A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has often been said that "a knowledge of history is essential to an understanding of the present." This fact is well illustrated in contemporary Christian social thought. Only a generation ago, the name Walter Rauschenbusch was a household word among American ministers. As the prophet of the Social Gospel, he was the recognized authority in America on the subject of Christian social ethics. Contemporary ministers, however, have all but forgotten his name, and in its place stands that of Reinhold Niebuhr.

In order to fully understand Niebuhr, however, it is necessary to know something of Rauschenbusch. The latter began his career in the last half of the nineteenth century. At that time, many in America were saying that "business is business and religion is religion," with the obvious meaning that these are two separate areas of life and that neither is to be dominated or greatly influenced by the other. In the role of prophet of the Social Gospel, Walter Rauschenbusch played a leading part in the reversal of this nineteenth century point of view. Reinhold Niebuhr received his education in the atmosphere of the Social Gospel; and though he later came to differ with Rauschenbusch on many points, he has never questioned the validity of Rauschenbusch's belief in the relevance of the Christian Gospel for the solution of modern social problems.

It is the primary purpose of this dissertation to show that Niebuhr has developed his social ethics on the basis of the major premise of Rauschenbusch, namely: the Christian Gospel is relevant to all areas of life, for both man and society stand in need of salvation. While they each affirm this premise, there are both agreements and disagreements between the two men on how the Christian Gospel is relevant to each particular social problem, on the nature of man, and on the nature of personal and social salvation. The secondary purpose of this dissertation is to discover and set forth, primarily in relation to their social ethics, these agreements and disagreements.

This first chapter will set forth the changed historical conditions during the period from 1861 to 1957, along with a biographical sketch of each man. The main points of comparison and contrast between the two men will also be pointed out. In the second chapter their doctrines of man, including some of their major theological presuppositions, will be presented. The purpose of the second chapter in relation to Rauschenbusch's major premise is to show what Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each believes to be man's condition in society which calls for salvation. Chapter three will be a study of their doctrines of salvation and social hope. The chapter will show what Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr consider to be the personal and social salvation for which man and society stand in need. Then chapter four will present their ethical principles and show in what way Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr hold the Christian Gospel to be relevant to each particular social problem. The application of their ethical principles will be illustrated in the following three areas of social concern: the industrial economy, racial relations, and international relations. Then the conclusion will be presented.

Relevant Historical Factors of the Period 1861-1957

In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, "we are all, whatever our pretensions, the children of our day and hour."[1] This means that even "what we think of man and God, of sin and salvation, is partly prompted by the comparative comforts or discomforts in which we live."[2] And this, Niebuhr continues, is "a very sobering reflection on the lack of transcendence of the human spirit over the flux of historical change."[3]

The following pages contain a sketch of the historical period in which Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr lived and the problems each faced. The life-span of

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoe String Press, 1929), Preface--1956.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch extends from the Civil War to almost the close of World War I, while that of Niebuhr extends from 1892 until the present. This period covers almost a hundred years of remarkable and extensive changes both on this continent and throughout the world. With the firing of the last shot of the Civil War, one era ended and a new one bagan.

A period of unusual creativity followed the Civil War and showed itself in a variety of forms. In 1869 the first transcontinental railroad reached completion, thus tying the old East to the new West; David Boyle and C. P. A. Linde produced the refrigerating machine in 1873-75; the first telephone got its patent in 1876, and 1878 witnessed the development of the incandescent light.[1]

In the period of "reconstruction" the forces of the industrial revolution, encouraged by the demands of the great conflict, swept victoriously over the agrarian economy that had long been dominant. By 1880 an energetic capitalism had built the foundations of modern America in an industrial order that rapidly transformed the rural United States of the Civil War era into an interdependent nation of thriving cities.

Mark Twain satirized this unique society as the "gilded age." Charles Hopkins points out that, being a 'welter of crude new energy,' this 'chromo civilization' satisfied its elemental desires by raping a virgin continent and ignoring its illegitimate offspring."[1] This struggle for possession of the country's unlimited resources amounted to "nothing less than the 'Great Barbecue' at which the common man was handed a farm, while the 'Iron Buccaneers' of railroad, industry, and finance carved for themselves empires whose vastness and power--and whose rulers' methods--Caesar might have envied."[2]

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[1] Dores R. Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942), pp. 1-2.

As is often true following a great war, traditional ethical and social standards became severely strained by such postwar moral reaction. Corruption became widespread in all levels of government: local, state, and national. Hopkins writes:

> In an atmosphere of optimism and moral laxity speculation flourished until the panic of 1873 brought the sobering realization that progress could not be built on watered stocks or blueprints. The lesson was made painfully clear to the working classes by unprecedented unemployment and desperate poverty. Bread lines appeared in the city streets of a nation rapidly becoming the richest country in the world. But the kings of industry and finance paid little heed and an exaggerated individualism continued to ride roughshod over human rights. Even the volcanic eruption of working-class discontent in 1877 hardly checked them.[3]

The full impact of the Industrial Revolution, which had bugun many years before in England, began now to be felt throughout the Western world as vast masses of humanity changed their homes and their customs. Homeless European peasants and proletarians landed on the shores of America seeking liberty and wealth. They often settled in the slums and foreign districts of the large cities where they, as unadjusted aliens, became a boundless source of cheap labor.

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[1] Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 11.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

American cities experienced a period of amazing growth. Such growth, however, was not just a result of foreign immigration. The Western frontier no longer offered an opportunity for the poverty stricken. Young men, drawn by the stories of farm boys who had become wealthy, left the farm to head for the factories. They failed to realize that for every Vanderbilt, Astor, Harriman, Gould, or Rockefeller there were millions living in shameful poverty. New industries developed as a result of the many new inventions. A revolution in transportation took place as new railroads stretched across the continent, as the combustion engine and the automobile became a reality, and as man's flight became possible with the invention of the airplane. Electricity was harnessed by man and used to light houses and to run machines. Gasoline was developed from the waste products of the oil refineries and soon became the fuel for the new automobiles. In regard to this period, Dores Sharpe writes:

> Little wonder that the generations between the Civil War and the World War, dazzled and breathless, failed to note very much the seamier side of all this development, and only very tardily began to see the moral and economic, the social and political problems that were being created by it. There was wealth, there were also unemployment, poverty, slums, corrupt city and state governments, cutthroat competition in business and industry. In sprawling and ungainly cities, blatant exhibitionism on the part of the newly-rich concealed the disease, the undernourishment, the insecurity, the suffering and the fear in crowded tenement houses a few blocks away. Rauschenbusch

understood and interpreted the moral significance of these social issues.[1]

Writing in 1907 in his first major book on the social question, Rauschenbusch pointed out that "the common mind of the Christian Church in America has not begun to arrive at any solid convictions or any permanent basis of action."[2] As to the conscience of Christendom, he states:

> It is halting and groping, perplexed by contradicting voices, still poorly informed on essential questions, justly reluctant to part with the treasured maxims of the past, and yet conscious of the imperious call of the future.[3]

Although by 1907 the conscience of Christendom is spoken of by Rauschenbusch as being "still poorly informed on essential questions," it was not unaware of social problems. Timothy L. Smith in his book, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America, points out that America's leading evangelists as early as 1840 to 1865 increasingly stressed the need for social reform. Their sermons reflected the optimism of the age in that they stressed total sanctification and the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Smith writes:

> Far from disdaining earthly affairs, the evangelists played a key role in the widespread attack upon slavery,

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[1] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 2-4.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), p. xiii.

[3] Ibid.

poverty, and greed. They thus helped prepare the way both in theory and in practice for what became known as the social gospel.[1]

Dores Sharpe notes that the problems posed after the Civil War were in some respects completely new in the history of man. Even men who, like Rauschenbusch, were aware of the problems did not know how best to solve them. Sharpe asks:

> How, for example, should a democracy deal with trusts, or with preferential rates on railroads? Experience offered no technique, for there had previously been no democracy, no trusts, no railroads. How should an exceptionally able and conscientious Christian man like John D. Rockefeller deal with the moral problem that was raised when, in an era which prided itself on the virtues of competition by means of preferential rates on the railroads, his competitors were determined to strangle him and would have done so if only they had been clever enough? There were few ethical and legal precedents, because such possibilities had never existed before. How were citizens of a country, which had always been a land of small towns and rural villages, to know how to deal with the political and social complications of suddenly overgrown urban centers like New York, Chicago, Cleveland?[2]

While the industrial development of America continued at a rapid pace, a new group of problems arose that Rauschenbusch came to deal with only in the closing years of his career, but which increasingly became a major concern of Niebuhr. The United States had to decide what position it was to play in the complicated affairs of the community of nations. Sharpe points out that "the Spanish-American War marked the turning point from a self-centered isolation to participation in international affairs as a world power--indeed as an imperial world power."[1] A few years later came the first World War when we were drawn into a conflict that many, including both Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr, had hoped so desperately to avoid.

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[1] Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 8. For a point of view contrary to that of Smith see Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949).

[2] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 4.

In addition to experiencing these outward changes, the American people, and, in fact, the entire Western world, experienced an intellectual revolution. In 1859 the first edition of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species created a sensation with its emphasis on evolution in the field of biology. It was not long before the evolutionary concept was being applied to other areas of life as well. The doctrine of evolution rapidly received acclaim throughout the world.[2] Its acceptance, however, did not come about within a day. Neither can it be dated from the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859. Rather, as John Randall points out, "that event symbolized the new attitude that had in many ways been making progress in men's thinking since the middle of the preceding century."[3] He goes on to affirm that Darwin's book stands "as the confident marshalling of evidence and the systematic formulation in strictly scientific terms of a view that had already been for some time gaining acceptance by the best intellects."[4] The progress and development of man from the very beginnings of life was stressed by Herder in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and by Hegel in the early nineteenth.[1] The rationalistic thinkers of the Enlightenment with their increased emphasis on progress, and the romanticists with their stress on a process of development in time, helped to prepare the way for the success of the biological formulation of evolution. As is noted by Randall, "only such a state of affairs can explain the almost instantaneous acceptance of Darwin's doctrine when it was put forth in 1859."[2] Instead of holding to the ancient conception of a static universe, men accepted the conception of universal development.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[3] John Herman Randall, Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind (1st ed. rev.; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940), p. 461.

[4] Ibid.

Sharpe points out that Rauschenbusch grasped the new idea and applied it "to history, politics, scientific theory, social patterns, ethics, religion, personal development."[3] Sharpe goes on to note that many old traditions lost their hold on the human mind as it came to enjoy a new freedom. A belief in political democracy spread quickly around the world, undermining and at times conquering reactionary institutions. Losing old inhibitions, men now felt free to criticize the most basic assumptions of science, philosophy and religion.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 463. [2] Ibid., p. 461.

[3] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 5.

[4] Ibid.

In reality many of these changes, which the theory of evolution helped to bring to fruition, can be traced back to the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, men rejected historical traditions while glorying in the promise of new methods. They affirmed the goodness of man and his ability through the use of reason to create an earthly utopia. Men dreamed of a rational world of continual peace. In contrast to orthodox Christianity's stress on heaven, men emphasized the power of reason to reorder earthly society. Men believed that they could find the means for securing continuous progress. These ideas of the Enlightenment were particularly influential in America. This country was born in the age of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. It was far easier for America than for Europe to break with the past and to build a rational history. Roger L. Shinn in his book, Christianity and the Problem of History, writes:

> A religion of the frontier [in America] took the place of, or was superimposed on, Christianity. In the self-confidence of a growing nation, the lack of interest in any history more distant than its own, the desire to avoid foreign entanglements, the assurance that history could be freed from the weight of the past with its kings and traditions, America has made this modern faith peculiarly its own.[1]

Protestant theologians had to struggle to conserve the gains of the Enlightenment, and at the same time to recover the religious depths and particular Christian witness which appeared lost in the Enlightenment. Probably the most outstanding Protestant theologian who came to grips with the issues of the Enlightenment was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). At times he has been referred to as the father of modern liberal theology. His influence is frequently reflected in the thought of Walter Rauschenbusch. John Dillenberger and Claude Welch point out that "Schleiermacher first made explicit the understanding that the teachings of the church are really explanations or explications of Christian experience."[1] In this way, he noted that many of the criticisms of Christianity as propounded by the rationalists and romantics were essentially beside the point. The Christian statements of faith are not dependent upon the support of natural theology or ethics, nor are they easily derived from an infallible scripture or creed. In regard to Schleiermacher's view of the Bible, Dillenberger and Welch write:

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[1] Roger L. Shinn, Christianity and the Problem of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 105-108.

> The Bible and the creeds are important, but as records and interpretations of the experience of Christians. The Christian does not have faith in Christ because of the Bible; rather the Bible gains its authority from the believer's faith in Christ. The heart of Christianity, Schleiermacher had learned from the Moravians, is not doctrine or ethic, but a new life in Christ.[2]

Another German theologian who contributed much to the development of liberal theology and the thought of Walter Rauschenbusch is Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). He was an outstanding Biblical critic who took as his motto "Back to the New Testament by way of the Reformation." Above all, he endeavored to place the historical Jesus at the center of theology. He agreed with Schleiermacher in trying to base all faith affirmations on Christian experience. Dillenberger and Welch note that "Ritschl described the Gospel as an ellipse with two foci: 1) Justification and Reconciliation, and 2) the kingdom of God."[1] According to the doctrines of justification and reconciliation, the redemptive work of Christ is passed on to the Christian through the Church. God's purpose is to establish a fellowship of redeemed persons, the Kingdom of God. Reconciliation is for the benefit of the Kingdom, "the organization of humanity through action inspired by love." According to Dillenberger and Welch, Ritschl all "too readily identified the ethical goals of Christianity with the cultural ideals of his time."[2] This identification encouraged many liberals, including Rauschenbusch, to confuse Christianity with cultural faith and ideals. Ritschl's rediscovery of the central place of the concept of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, together with his interpretation of the kingdom, greatly influenced Rauschenbusch in his development of the Social Gospel. Ritschl helped Rauschenbusch to realize that the Christian Gospel is relevant to all areas of life.

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[1] John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity Interpreted through Its Development (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 188.

[2] Ibid.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 198-199.

[2] Ibid., p. 199.

There are two other aspects of Ritschl's teaching which are reflected in Rauschenbusch's thought. These are summed up by Dillenberger and Welch as follows:

> First, his insistence that God is love--not simply that love is one of the attributes of God, along with justice, power, etc., but that God _is_ love. This is his inmost nature, his very being. Thus the notion of God's holiness and justice was suppressed (and the idea of God's wrath was denied). This teaching resulted in the practical abandonment of the traditional doctrines of punishment of the damned. Second, and connected with the former, was a qualification of classical doctrines of sin. Partly because of his notion of the religious problem as one of spirit versus nature, partly because of the prevailing mood of the late nineteenth century, partly because of his opposition to "theoretical" doctrines, Ritschl rejected the idea of "original sin." He was much more optimistic about the possibility of overcoming sin than either traditional Protestantism or Protestant thought since the First World War.[1]

The intellectual freedom which became a reality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often took the form of historical criticism. This criticism was applied to the Bible in the forms known by the titles of "higher and lower criticism." Religion was understood as having developed within the Bible itself from a primitive form until it finally reached its height in the Jesus of the Gospels. The old method of building theologies on proof texts came to be seriously questioned. Not only the Bible received such scrutiny, but the entire history of the Church as well. Such criticism helped to break down denominational barriers and to open the way for more cooperation among Protestant bodies. In 1908 the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America became a reality. Rauschenbusch played a leading role in this movement.[1]

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 200.

Other phases of religious thought also came in for scrutiny. Such men as Kingsley, Maurice, and Ruskin of England applied Christian ethics to the various social problems raised by contemporary civilization; and, in this country, even previous to the Civil War, the Christian conscience was being awakened. Gradually under the leadership of such men as Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden the teachings and spirit of Jesus came to be focused on the innumerable social problems of America.[2]

Another factor that must be considered in the intellectual background of this period is the rise of Marxian socialism. Marxism accepted many of the tenets of liberal culture including the belief in progress. Marxists believed that development on a universal scale grew out of the inevitable logic of history. They predicted the increased concentration of capital and at the same time the increased poverty of the workers until the middle classes would be completely destroyed. Only two classes would be left, the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor. Bitter class warfare would increase until a great revolution would take place, ending in the complete victory of the proletariat, who would then proceed to become both the owners and rulers of the entire world. There would then be a classless society in which industry would be managed in the light of the following slogan: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." According to Sharpe:

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[1] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 5-7.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

> Rauschenbusch pointed out that while Marxian socialism was materialistic and atheistic, it was intellectually far more finely wrought than its opponents realized. Its doctrines of surplus value and of class warfare, its economic interpretation of history, explained--rightly or wrongly--a great deal that no one else could explain. Its predictions had an apocalyptic ring. Its challenge to economic injustices stirred men's consciences.[1]

The religious atmosphere in which the Social Gospel arose, at least in its early years, offered much opposition to the movement. In the secular world, however, the innumerable changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution combined with the acceptance of evolution tended to create an attitude of hope, faith and understanding which contributed to the rise of the social consciousness. This was the day of optimism and progress. Americans tended to believe it possible that by making certain adjustments all their problems could be solved.[2]

The development of the Social Gospel was Christianity's answer to the problems posed by the era extending from the Civil War to World War I. A group of dedicated Christian leaders formulated its principles and proclaimed its message throughout the world.[1] This period covers the life-span of Walter Rauschenbusch. He was a child of his period, but at the same time "its trenchant critic, and its inspired prophet."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 8.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

Though the First World War came as a drastic blow to the optimistic and pacifistic tendencies of progressive Christians, the Social Gospel still succeeded in retaining a considerable measure of vitality during the early nineteen-twenties. Yet, according to the thought of Frederick L. Allen, the crusading spirit of the Social Gospel in its latter days may be compared to "a bank whose funds were being overdrawn."[3] It did last long enough, however, to hasten the ratification of the woman suffrage amendment and the prohibition amendment which went into effect in January, 1920. But then, somewhat abruptly, men discovered that the impulse to improve the nation and the world had faded. People had had their fill of "high causes and noble sacrifices," and now wanted to relax and enjoy themselves. The "roaring twenties" had begun.[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 8. For a more complete discussion of this era see Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, 1865-1878, Vol. VIII of A History of American Life, eds. Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon R. Fox (13 vols.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1927); Ida M. Tarbell, The Nationalizing of Business, 1878-1898, Vol. IX; Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City, 1878-1898, Vol. X; and Harold U. Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice, 1898-1914, Vol. XI.

[3] Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 105.

Weary of reforms and crusades, the people elected as President in 1920 Warren G. Harding, whose slogan was "back to normalcy." Later, it turned out that he had among his friends in office some flagrant grafters. He died some time before the full truth of the scandals became known, and was succeeded by Calvin Coolidge, who did not come to grips with any national problem until it was absolutely necessary.[2]

This period witnessed the relaxation of the social code, accompanied by a wave of religious skepticism. The Scopes trial took place in Dayton, Tennessee, and, for many, science appeared to be "making mincemeat of the old-time religion."[3]

As for business, it seemed that nothing could halt its onward march. Certainly not the government, for, as Allen points out, "regulatory officials and commissions seemed mostly to be napping along with Coolidge."[4] Neither could labor, for after a series of strikes immediately after the war, unionism weakened. The above named writer notes that "total trade-union membership in the United States dwindled from over five millions in 1920 to less than four millions in 1927 and three and a third millions in 1931."[1]

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[1] _Ibid_.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 132.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 136.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 140.

Herbert Hoover followed Calvin Coolidge into the White House in March, 1929. By this time the spiral of inflated stocks was out of control and the country was well on its way to the worst depression in its history. On the morning of October 24, 1929, the inflated balloon of American prosperity burst. For a number of days the prices of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange had been going down; that morning they dropped in uncontrollable panic. The "Great Depression" had begun. For over three years Hoover struggled along with various efforts to halt the depression and to restore business confidence, but to no avail.[2]

In 1932 Hoover was defeated by Franklin D. Roosevelt, who came to office on March 4, 1933, just as the banking system of the United States came to a complete halt. In his Inaugural Address, Roosevelt declared that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Immediately he initiated the famous "One Hundred Days" of legislation which witnessed the opening of the banks and the passage of numerous reform and relief bills which stimulated the economy and brought at least a measure of recovery.[1] In 1936 he swept to victory over the Republican, Landon, and the Socialist, Norman Thomas.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 143-146.

Occasionally during the early and middle nineteen-thirties, the American people received serious reminders from across the water that the world contained warlike nations. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia in 1935, and Hitler's entrance into the Rhineland in 1936 all caused intense American disapproval, but the vast majority of Americans felt that these matters were not their affair.[2] The historic events from 1937 through 1940 are well summarized by Frederick L. Allen as follows:

> By 1937 Hitler and Mussolini were both actively aiding the dictator Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In that same year the Japanese attacked China. In March, 1938, Hitler occupied Austria. In the fall of that year, at the Munich conference, he browbeat England and France into consenting to his partial occupation of Czechoslovakia. The next spring he brazenly occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, and Mussolini invaded Albania. In the late summer of 1939 Hitler made an alliance with Stalin and then attacked Poland; this time England and France could stand aside no longer, and World War II was under way. By the next summer--the summer of 1940--the horrified American people had seen Finland attacked by Russia, Denmark and Norway overrun by Hitler, and the Low Countries and even France unbelievably smashed; only Britian now stood between Hitler and the total conquest of Europe, and Britain's ability to endure hung in the balance.[3]

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 147.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 158.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 160.

Slowly the discouraging sequence of events shocked the American people into a gradual but meaningful change of conviction as to the wisdom of their policy of isolationism. The news from abroad began to overcome such beliefs of the mid-twenties as the notion that wars are caused by munitions makers. Public opinion so changed that by the time of the collapse of France in June, 1940, the United States was beginning to increase its defense production, and almost everyone agreed that the nation needed to arm itself. Soon Roosevelt was making arrangements to send guns and over-age destroyers to Britain. In the fall of 1940 the American draft law went into operation. Yet at the same time, the two Presidential candidates, Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie, while insisting on aid to Europe, both opposed leading the United States into the war. Then the following year as Germany bombed British cities, took over the Balkans, and invaded Russia, and as the Japanese increasingly threatened to conquer the Far East, opinion began to support increased intervention. This change of opinion was reflected in the passage of the Lend-Lease Act, and in the convoying of American supplies part way to England by American warships. Under these circumstances the United States found itself practically in a state of undeclared war with Germany.[1]

The purpose of this study does not permit the tracing of all the events during the war years, but I do want briefly to call attention to some of the great events of the year 1945. In April, as the American armies in both Europe and Asia were in the process of sweeping to victory, Franklin D. Roosevelt died and the tremendous responsibility of the Presidency of the United States became that of the Vice-President, Harry S. Truman. Later the same month an international conference met at San Francisco to set up the United Nations organization. By early May both Hitler and Mussolini were dead and Germany had surrendered. In July, the atomic age began with the explosion of the first atomic bomb in New Mexico. In August, America dropped the bomb on two Japanese cities, and Japan surrendered--just after Stalin had begun to move into Manchuria. V-J Day brought great rejoicing, with many hoping that it meant an era of peace.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 160-162.

With the Axis powers defeated, Americans no sooner started to relax than they became increasingly aware that Soviet Russia intended to conquer the world. The United States found it necessary to keep large occupation forces in both Asia and Europe, to aid an almost bankrupt Britain with a loan, to strengthen Greece and Turkey under the Truman Doctrine, to launch the Marshall Plan, to manage a dangerous airlift to Berlin, and to form an Atlantic Pact for the protection of Western Europe. Then in 1950 America found it necessary to take part in a "police action" to halt

Communist aggression in South Korea.[1] Increasingly international relations became a major problem for students of Christian ethics such as Reinhold Niebuhr.

One of the major problems at home became the question of civil liberties. Such men as Senator McCarthy threatened the basic freedom of the American people in their efforts to free the United States of communists and fellow travelers. Then with the Supreme Court's decision on school integration the racial question came into increasing prominence. It is such problems as these which form the background for the thought of Niebuhr. Even his theology developed as a result of such social, economic and political questions as have been presented in this historical sketch.

Biographical Sketch of Walter Rauschenbusch

Though Walter Rauschenbusch is best known as a prophet of social justice, according to G. Walter Fiske, he "would never in his life have claimed to be a prophet."[2] He is described by Fiske as follows:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 173-174. For a fuller discussion of most of this era see Preston Wm. Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1928, Vol. XII of A History of American Life; and Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941, Vol. XIII.

[2] G. Walter Fiske, "Walter Rauschenbusch," Founders of Christian Movements, Vol. III of Creative Personalities, ed. Henry Philip Lotz (3 vols.; New York: Association Press, 1941), p. 19.

> Scholar, teacher, minister, preacher, theologian, historian, social worker, and great lover of the poor--he was all of these. . . . Though a quiet, mild-mannered person, a lover of peace, and naturally shunning publicity, his keen sense of justice and loyalty to truth and duty ultimately drove him to champion the rights of the oppressed and underprivileged as fearlessly as the ancient prophets, Amos and Isaiah, but always in the kindly spirit of Jesus Christ, the Master he uncompromisingly obeyed and adored. The key to his brave, strong, sacrificial life was simply his love for Christ and fellow men.[1]

Walter Rauschenbusch was born in Rochester, New York, on October 4, 1861.[2] He died in Rochester on July 25, 1918.[3] Between these dates is compressed one of the most vigorous and influential lives in the history of the American churches.

Rauschenbusch descended from an unbroken line of six evangelical German ministers. His father, Augustus Rauschenbusch, arrived in the United States in 1846 to pursue the task of a Lutheran missionary among the German immigrants. He later became a Baptist and in 1858 accepted an invitation to teach church history in the German Division of the Rochester Theological Seminary. He remained in this position until 1890. Then he returned to Germany where he remained until his death in 1899.[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "Walter Rauschenbusch," Who's Who in America, 1918-1919, Vol. X.

[3] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 1.

According to Vernon P. Bodein, Rauschenbusch's life and work easily fall into three periods, the first of which extends to approximately 1892. By this time his thought had matured to the extent that he felt the need of linking social problems with personal religious experience and of joining with other like-minded Christians in the formation of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. The next period is that from 1892 to 1907, during which time his thought about the Kingdom of God and social issues continued to mature, and he accepted his professorship in the Rochester Theological Seminary. The last period of his life includes the years from 1907 to 1918, when he died. It is in this span of his life that he became famous as prophet of the Social Gospel, and wrote seven books.[2]

Walter Rauschenbusch began his education in Rochester, New York, graduating from the Rochester Free Academy. His father then sent him to the Gymnasium at Guterloch, Germany, where he finished with first honors in 1883. He returned to America in time to enter the University of

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[1] Address by Walter Rauschenbusch, reported in Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (October 27, 1900), quoted in Vernon Parker Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and Its Relation to Religious Education (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 1.

[2] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 50.

Rochester and the Rochester Theological Seminary in the fall of 1883. He received the A.B. degree from the University in 1885 and completed his work at the Seminary in 1886.[1]

Before beginning his advanced education, Rauschenbusch had a vital religious experience that changed his outlook on life, and eventually led to his entering the ministry. In regard to this, he said:

> And then, physically, came the time of awakening for me, when young manhood was coming on me and I began to feel the stirring of human ambition within me; and what I said to myself was, "I want to become a man; I want to be respected; and if I go on like this, I can not have the respect of men." This was my way of saying, "I am out in the far country and I want to get home to my country, and I do not want to tend hogs any longer." And so I came to my Father, and I began to pray for help and I got it. And I got my own religious experience. . . . It turned me permanently, and I thank God with all my heart for it. It was a tender, mysterious experience. It influenced my soul down to its depths.[2]

After his graduation from the seminary, Rauschenbusch sought to become a foreign missionary under the Northern Baptist Foreign Mission Society. He was turned down because his Old Testament professor questioned his orthodoxy.

Having been rejected for mission service, Rauschenbusch accepted the call to become pastor of the small

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," *Cleveland's Young Men* (January 9, 1913), quoted in Bodein, *The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch*, p. 2. Bodein notes that this was "an address delivered at the Central Y.M.C.A., Cleveland, Ohio, January 2, 1913."

Second German Baptist Church on the borders of "Hell's Kitchen" in New York City. Though his Old Testament professor may have questioned his orthodoxy in regard to Old Testament interpretation, Walter Rauschenbusch, in 1886, would have been considered "orthodox" by his fellow ministers.[1] His goal on entering the pastorate was to bring men into "living and personal relations with our Lord Jesus Christ."[2]

It was not many months until he began to realize that something more than the orthodox idea of conversion was needed. His poor parishioners were overcome by social injustice. The social conditions of New York City were so bad that souls saved on Sunday became lost again by the following Saturday night. The social education of Rauschenbusch began among the poor working people of his church and neighborhood. It came from his contact with bitter poverty through such experiences as having to conduct funeral services for little children who had died as a result of malnutrition and from diseases brought on by the tragic living conditions in the slum districts of New York City.[3] His experiences as a pastor helped to increase his sense of social responsibility and to develop his later judgment that the cause of much social unrest and suffering lay within the capitalistic system itself. According to his thought, "industrial crises are not inevitable in nature; they are merely inevitable in capitalism."[1]

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[1] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 3.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, Letter to Ford (June 30, 1886), quoted in Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 60.

[3] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 4.

In the face of such conditions as these, Rauschenbusch realized that the application of his previous religious ideas did not meet the need. In order to insure spiritual conservation, he concluded, some type of social redemption is necessary. Society itself stands in need of being cleansed and redeemed. Souls cannot be saved in a vacuum. It is imperative that men be saved in their group relations, or they do not truly experience salvation. Groups that are guilty of injustices must be cleansed.[2]

When Rauschenbusch became interested in social questions he discovered that his friends did not recognize social work as Christian work. They asked him to give it up, but he continued his efforts in behalf of the needy. He began to write for newspapers and in this way clarified his own ideas. In December, 1887, he wrote his first article on social problems. He titled the article "Henry

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[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 238.

[2] Fiske, "Walter Rauschenbusch," Founders of Christian Movements, pp. 20-21.

George." In it he wrote a description and a brief biography of Henry George, as well as his understanding of society's illness. Rauschenbusch was greatly influenced by Henry George, who was running for Mayor at the time of Rauschenbusch's arrival in New York.[1] Years later he said, "I owe my own first awakening to the world of social problems to the agitation of Henry George in 1886, and wish here to record my lifelong debt to this single-minded apostle of a great truth."[2]

Rauschenbusch found support for his new social ideas in what he considered to be the "Biblical concept" of the Kingdom of God. In regard to the way he arrived at this concept, Sharpe writes:

> Rauschenbusch found that his religious ideas were not capable of being applied to [the] tragic and sinful conditions [of society]. There was a chasm between the gospel for the individual and a gospel big enough to redeem the whole social system. He therefore sought a unifying principle that would combine the personal and the social both for him and for the Church. On the one hand, was his warm, glowing individual experience; on the other, was his conviction that society must be made righteous and brotherly. Jesus had spoken to him too clearly on both for him to let either go. Then the noble conception of the Kingdom of God came to him.[3]

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[1] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 4-5.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), p. 394.

[3] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 62.

Of this inspiration he later wrote:

> And then the idea of the Kingdom of God offered itself as the real solution for that problem. Here was something so big that absolutely nothing that interested me was excluded from it. Was it a matter of personal religion? Why, the Kingdom of God begins with that. . . . Was it a matter of world-wide missions? Why, that is the Kingdom of God, isn't it?--carrying it out to the boundaries of the earth. Was it a matter of getting justice for the working man? Is not justice a part of the Kingdom of God? Does not the Kingdom of God consist of this: that God's will shall be done on earth even as it is now in heaven? And so, wherever I touched life, there was the Kingdom of God. . . . It touches everything with religion; it carries God into everything that you do, and there is nothing else that does it in the same way.[1]

Reading in the Old Testament, Rauschenbusch received inspiration from such prophets as Amos, Hosea, and Micah, who were concerned about the social problems of the Hebrews before the time of Christ. In the New Testament he found that the view of wealth which many Christians held was at variance with the sayings of Jesus. According to Rauschenbusch, "Christ still hints that it takes a miracle of grace to get a rich man safely inside of the Kingdom."[2] Rauschenbusch asks: "Is Christ wrong? Or is the popular view incorrect on any point?"[3]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, "The Kingdom of God," Cleveland's Young Men (January 9, 1913), quoted in Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 62-63.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Saving Efficacy of Money," Christian Inquirer (1887), quoted in Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 5.

[3] Ibid.

The mental strain of seeking for a Christian answer to the social ills of society combined with the physical strain of ministering to his people in all kinds of weather made Rauschenbusch a prey to Russian grippe, which brought suffering to many during the winter of 1888. Before his illness he personally heard the cry of the needy. After this illness he could hear such a cry only through the ears of others or read from human lips the ache of men's hearts. To answer the cry of his fellow men, he left his bed too soon. He underwent a relapse which resulted in tragic deafness. This cut him off from other men and at times brought on severe loneliness.[1]

In 1893 Walter Rauschenbusch married Miss Pauline Rother, a Milwaukee school teacher. She brought companionship to a life which had known much loneliness. They had five children, three boys and two girls. Rauschenbusch had a happy family life which was a source of inspiration to him.[2]

In November, 1889, Elizabeth Post, J. E. Raymond, Leighton Williams and Rauschenbusch founded a monthly periodical entitled For the Right. The purpose of the paper is set forth in this statement of its first issue:

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[1] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 65-66.

[2] Ibid., pp. 71-75.

> This paper is published in the interests of the working people of New York City. It proposes to discuss, from the standpoint of Christian-socialism, such questions as engage their attention and affect their life. . . .Its aim is to reflect in its pages the needs, aspirations, and longings of the tens of thousands of wage-earners who are sighing for better things; and to point out, if possible, not only the wrongs that men suffer, but the methods by which these wrongs may be removed.[1]

For the Right was published only between November, 1889, and March, 1891. According to Bodein, during this period Rauschenbusch used this periodical as the means by which to express his views on "economic and industrial issues, on politics, on separation of Church and State, on religion, and the Kingdom of God."[2]

In May, 1892, a group of about a half-dozen men met in the city of Philadelphia in an informal conference "to promote mutual acquaintance and to consider some methods of closer co-operation in Christian work."[3] One of the leaders at this conference was Samuel Z. Batten, then pastor of the Baptist Church of Manayunk, Pennsylvania. Apparently his thought had been in the same general direction as that of Leighton Williams and Rauschenbusch. Williams states:

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[1] For the Right, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November, 1889), quoted in Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 9.

[2] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch p. 10.

[3] Leighton Williams, "The Brotherhood of the Kingdom and Its Work," The Kingdom (1907), quoted in Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 17.

> The thought working in his [Batten's] mind was somewhat different, but seemed entirely germane to that in ours. Mr. Batten had been led to dwell much upon the teachings of Jesus regarding the Kingdom, and suggested the formation of an organization which should be devoted to the study and realization of that idea.[1]

This group of young men held their second meeting in New York in July of the same year. At that time they agreed on two points: "the feeling that the social aspects of the gospel needed special emphasis, and that the Kingdom of God, the central idea of the gospel, contemplated a new and divine order on earth."[2] At the suggestion of S. Z. Batten, they formed a society called "The Brotherhood of the Kingdom." The organizational meeting was held in Philadelphia in December, 1892.[3]

From 1892 on, Rauschenbusch's principle social activity centered in the work of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, especially while he was a pastor in New York City. Until 1897, and possibly later, he held the position of Corresponding Secretary. He was also on its executive committee.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 17, summarized from S. Z. Batten, The Brotherhood of the Kingdom (1902).

[3] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 17, summarized from E. F. Merriam, "The Brotherhood of the Kingdom," The Watchman (August 13, 1908).

[4] Vernon P. Bodein, "Walter Rauschenbusch," Religion in Life, VI (Summer, 1937), 422.

In 1894 a reporter interviewed Rauschenbusch in regard to the question of the relationship between the Brotherhood and Christian socialism. The reporter received the answer that the Brotherhood as an official body did not endorse socialism, but that the majority tended toward Christian socialism. Rauschenbusch felt that one could not be an individualist after reading the Sermon on the Mount. At the same time, however, it could not be said that the members of the Brotherhood were in harmony with the general socialistic movement.[1] Rauschenbusch himself never joined the Socialist Party, for he did not agree with all its tenets. He did, however, belong to the Christian Socialist Fellowship and sat on its executive committee. This organization consisted of socialist Christians who had confidence in socialism as a movement which promised social and industrial salvation, and which in its ideals drew near to the economic gospel of the Kingdom of God.[2]

In 1897 Rauschenbusch moved to Rochester, where he remained the rest of his life. He now felt that he could leave the work of the pastorate for the position in the theological seminary. He accepted an invitation from "the German Department of the Rochester Theological Seminary to teach New Testament Interpretation, natural sciences, and civil government to young German-Americans."[1]

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[1] "Christian Socialism and the Brotherhood of the Kingdom" (reporter's interview), New York Press (June 3, 1894), summarized in Bodein, ~~The~~ Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 25.

[2] Bodein, "Walter Rauschenbusch," Religion in Life, VI, 424.

In 1902 Rauschenbusch accepted the invitation of the English Department of the Rochester Theological Seminary to teach church history. It is interesting that his position as professor of church history soon became overshadowed by the prominence of his outside work in social reform. He remained in this position until his death in 1918.[2]

From 1892 to 1907 Rauschenbusch's social thought developed and matured. In his essays, articles, and addresses of this period, there is a steadily progressive exploration of new opportunities in the relation of religion to social problems. He endeavored to bring all of his social ideas into the religious framework of his concept of the Kingdom of God. He often spoke on various issues which involved the welfare of the community and of the common man. Though an ardent churchman, he nevertheless severely criticized the Church for its failure to preach the ethical message of Christianity. During this period he began to work on his concept of social evil which explained the existence of corporate evil in spite of the good intentions of individuals. Along with his emphasis on social religion, he continued to maintain his stress on personal religion and the need for the redemption of the individual.[1] He believed himself to be both a social reformer and a Christian disciple. Writing in 1896, he stated:

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[1] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

> For my part, at least, I am a social reformer, though with feeble strength and sad cowardice. I am also a Christian disciple and in this double quality I have tried to hold the balance even.[2]

In 1907 with the publication of his first major book, Christianity and the Social Crisis, Rauschenbusch became famous almost overnight. Prior to 1907 he had become somewhat well known as a leader in the Social Gospel movement and was sought after by groups that shared his views. But with the publication of his first major work, he became known throughout the United States and later the entire world. Translations of his books later appeared in Finnish, Norwegian, French, German, Russian, Swedish, Chinese, and Japanese.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 49.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Ideals of Social Reformers," The American Journal of Sociology, II (September, 1896), 219.

[3] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 51.

Thus, Rauschenbusch became the recognized prophet of the Social Gospel. The major portion of his time throughout the remainder of his life, aside from his professorial duties, was devoted to the Social Gospel movement. During the first two decades of the Twentieth Century he stood as the outstanding figure in this field. Within this period in addition to writing Christianity and the Social Crisis, he wrote: Prayers of the Social Awakening (1910), Christianizing the Social Order (1912), Dare We Be Christians? (1914), The Social Principles of Jesus (1916), and A Theology for the Social Gospel (1917). He accepted the invitation to be "the Earl Lecturer at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, in 1910, and the Merrick Lecturer at Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, in 1911."[1] The material from these two lectures provided the nucleus of his second major book, Christianizing the Social Order. In January, 1911, Rauschenbusch lectured at the Yale Divinity School on "The Minister and the Social Crisis." In 1914 he delivered the Gates lectures at Grinnell College, and in 1917 the Taylor lectures at Yale Divinity School. The 1917 lectures at Yale, presented in expanded form, were later published as A Theology for the Social Gospel.

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[1] Ibid., p. 52.

Among other activities, Rauschenbusch took an interest in politics, but not as a strong party man. Voting first in 1884, he voted a straight Republican ticket. Since he never again voted a straight ticket, he should be considered as an independent. Believing that there had been an effort to protect the rights of the people in political movements at the first of the Twentieth Century, he felt impressed by the actions of President Theodore Roosevelt and Governor Hughes of New York.[1]

When World War I began in August, 1914, Rauschenbusch's usual optimistic outlook received a severe shock. The effect of this news on him is seen in his announced proposal to wear black crepe on the lapel of his coat until the war should terminate. The war brought to Walter Rauschenbusch emotional anxiety, deep uncertainties (especially for the progress of social Christianity), and increased fear for the future of civilization itself.[2]

As is often true, a man's prayers may reveal his inmost thoughts. This is certainly true of Rauschenbusch who wrote the following prayer shortly after the outbreak of World War I:

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[1] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch,

[2] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 356.

> O God, we call to Thee out of the darkness. The heavens are black with the storm-clouds of wrath. A hail of death is cutting down the harvest of the ages. We had hoped for an era of peace, and behold this war! We had trusted that the nations were moving with steady steps toward the brotherhood of man, and behold, humanity is thrust back to savagery. The spiritual achievements which generations toiled to build are being swept away as by a flood.
>
> . . . Amid the clash of battle build Thou up the larger unity of nations. Give freedom to common man. By the error of this experience confirm us all in a settled hate for war. Dispel forever the lies and illusions that have enchanted the mass. Make bare Thy mighty arm. Beat the sword and the cannon on the anvil of history till they are forged into tools of peace that will build up lasting institutions of international justice and redress.
>
> We thank Thee, O God, for the firmness and sagacity of our president and his advisers which cooled our own lust for war. We beseech Thee to save our nation from being sucked into the present flood of passion. May our land remain an island of peace in this red sea of trouble. Grant our people a sober and neutral mind, fair and friendly to all nations, remembering our own sins, and when the hour comes may our nation be fit to serve all mankind as the spokesman of peace and the healer of wounds.
>
> Our Father, let Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth! Forgive us our debts! Deliver us from evil! Amen.[1]

For Rauschenbusch the war "dwarfed and submerged all other issues, including our social problems."[2] In fact, he termed the war "the most acute and tremendous social problem of all."[3]

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[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, "Prayer in Time of War," The Independent, LXXX (October 5, 1914), 12.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1917), p. 4.

[3] Ibid.

For perhaps the first time in his career he took a major interest in international affairs and stressed the need for the "christianizing of international relations."[1] He saw that "before the War the social gospel dealt with social classes; to-day it is being translated into international terms."[2] Even the war did not completely destroy his optimism in regard to the future of the Social Gospel for he wrote that "after the War the social gospel will 'come back' with pent-up energy and clearer knowledge."[3]

Walter Rauschenbusch continued his work during the early years of the war, but it affected him deeply and he suffered from the cruel attitudes of many who had worked with him. In 1915 he joined with others in signing a statement opposing the export of war materials from the United States. For this act some suspected him of pro-German leanings, especially considering his family background and name.[4] Rauschenbusch felt that the churches all too readily switched from a gospel of peace to one of war. He believed that for many Christians "the ejection of the traders from the temple with a scourge of small cords, and the advice to the disciples to sell their cloaks and buy swords, took rank as important parts of the gospel."[5]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

[4] Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 71.

[5] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 65.

During the early years of the war, Rauschenbusch joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but his biographer, Dores R. Sharpe, holds that "he did not become an absolute pacifist," or "at least there is nothing in his speeches or writings to prove that he did."[1]

People continued to speculate about Rauschenbusch's war attitude and his silence only augmented the speculation. The culmination of this came when Rauschenbusch wrote a letter to a former colleague, Dr. Cornelius Woelfkin, pastor of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church in New York. Written only three months before his death, when he was already severely ill, it was Rauschenbusch's last writing to be published in his lifetime.[2] The following are exerpts from this letter:

> May 1, 1918
>
> Dear Doctor Woelfkin:
>
> I was born an American citizen, as you know, and have never dreamed of being anything else. Never, at any time, have I had any sense whatever of allegiance to any other government or nation.
>
> . . . .
>
> A victory for the central powers would doubtless fasten the philosophy of imperialism and militarism on the world. I should regard this as a terrible calamity to the world and have always feared a German triumph. I am not as sure as others that a victory for the allies would, of itself, free the world from imperialism.
>
> . . . .
>
> In these four years our nation has swung through many changes of thought and feeling. We have all passed

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[1] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 382.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 385.

> through experiences shocking and unexpected, for which no previous experience has prepared us. I have, all along, felt like a swimmer in a stormy sea, and have only been able to struggle with each impact as it came. Others seem to have found it easier to come to fixed conclusions, perhaps because they are in readier contact with public opinion than I can be.
>
> You may like to know that my son, Hilmar, with whom you used to play, volunteered as soon as he graduated from Amherst College last June. With my approval, he joined the Amherst unit for ambulance service and went to France in August. . . . We best realize some things through our children.
>
> Walter Rauschenbusch[1]

Many have raised the question as to what he meant by his closing statement that "we best realize some things through our children." Judging from the context of the whole letter, it is my belief that he meant the enlistment of his son, even though in a non-combat unit, had brought the war issue into sufficiently sharp focus as to enable him to decide in favor of American participation. Anyway, most of Rauschenbusch's friends accepted this letter as evidence of a changed attitude toward the war.[2]

It is highly probable that, despite his bitter disillusionment over the way his social ideals had apparently been crushed by the tragedy of World War I, Rauschenbusch would have continued his work. Death, however, claimed him before the end of the war. Being ill from an incurable disease, in the spring of 1918, he went for treatment to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. He passed away on July 25, 1918, and was laid to rest in Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York.

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[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, Letter to Dr. Cornelius Woelfkin (May 1, 1918), quoted in Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 385-388.

[2] Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 388-390.

An insight into his personality is contained in a few lines from his "Instructions in Case of My Death," which he wrote to his wife:

> I leave my love to those of my friends whose souls have never grown dark against me. I forgive the others and hate no man. For my many errors and weaknesses I hope to be forgiven by my fellows.
>
> I had long prayed God not to let me be stranded in a lonesome and useless old age, and if this is the meaning of my present illness, I shall take it as a loving mercy of God toward his servant. Since 1914 the world is full of hate and I cannot expect to be happy again in my lifetime. I had hoped to write several books which have been in my mind, but doubtless others can do the work better.
>
> The only pang is to part from my loved ones, and no longer to be able to stand by them and smooth their way. For the rest I go gladly, for I have carried a heavy handicap for thirty years and have worked hard.[1]

Biographical Sketch of Reinhold Niebuhr

"Reinhold Niebuhr is the most significant influence in contemporary American religious thought."[2] John C. Bennett made this statement in 1937, and the past twenty years have increasingly confirmed its truth. The fact that it is possible to date a noteable change in the atmosphere of American religious beliefs from the publication of Niebuhr's Moral Man and Immoral Society in 1932 has been so often repeated that it is now commonplace.

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[1] Excerpt sent to Vernon P. Bodein by Mrs. Walter Rauschenbusch in March, 1935, quoted in Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 72.

[2] John C. Bennett, "The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr," Religion in Life, VI (Spring, 1937), 268.

Niebuhr is recognized as having performed a real service for American Christians by mediating to them insights which have become common knowledge in Europe. John Bennett describes him as "the soul of Europe hovering over American thought."[1] Bennett goes on to note that it is most fortunate that Niebuhr "represents those insights in so moderate a form that it is possible for Americans to understand them without actually going through the experiences which have molded the minds of European Christians."[2]

As is true of the lives of many religious leaders, there is a real irony to the life of Reinhold Niebuhr. Just as Walter Rauschenbusch began his ministry with the intention of "winning souls in the accustomed manner" and ended as the leader in the "liberal Social Gospel" movement, so Niebuhr began his ministry with a "liberal Social Gospel" background to end up by becoming one of its severest critics. This irony is well put by William Lee Miller when he states:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

> In producing Niebuhr, American Protestantism did better than it intended. But then, that's what it always does. Dwight L. Moody converts young college man at revivals; they become leaders of a liberal Protestantism that repudiates Moody's fundamentalism and revivalism; Bishop McConnell and Walter Rauschenbusch inspire young men with the vision of Christian social idealism; the young men turn out to be Niebuhrs who expose the deficiencies of Christian social idealism.[1]

Reinhold Niebuhr was born on June 21, 1892. He is the son of the German Evangelical pastor, Gustav Niebuhr.[2] His father died when the children were young, but not before teaching Reinhold "that the critical faculty can be united with a reverent spirit."[3] In regard to his father, Niebuhr writes:

> The first formative religious influence on my life was my father, who combined a vital personal piety with a complete freedom in his theological studies. He introduced his sons and daughter to the thought of Harnack without fully sharing the liberal convictions of that theologian.[4]

Reinhold and his younger brother Richard Niebuhr, who at present is a Professor at Yale University Divinity School and a theologian in his own right, attended

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[1] William Lee Miller, "The Irony of Reinhold Niebuhr," The Reporter, XII (January 13, 1955), 14-15.

[2] D. R. Davies, Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet From America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 3.

[3] David Wesley Soper, Major Voices in American Theology: Six Contemporary Leaders (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 41.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought, The Library of Living Theology, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1956), p. 3.

Elmhurst College in Illinois (then of the Evangelical Church). In 1910, before completing his work at Elmhurst, Reinhold enrolled in Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, then of the Evangelical Synod of North America, now Evangelical and Reformed. After three years at Eden, he transferred to Yale where he received the B.D. (1914) and the M.A. (1915). The same year the Evangelical Synod of North America ordained him and he assumed his pastoral responsibilities at Bethel Evangelical Church, located in Detroit.[1]

Looking back on his work at Elmhurst and Eden, Niebuhr recently wrote:

> I was not interested in any academic disciplines. The seminary was influential in my life primarily because of the creative effect upon me of the life of a very remarkable man, Dr. S. D. Press, who combined a childlike innocency with a rigorous scholarship in Biblical and systematic subjects.[2]

As to his work at the Divinity School of Yale University he mentions that he particularly remembers two teachers who influenced the course of his development. Of them he writes:

> Professor Porter was at that time the New Testament theologian. His lucid and comprehensive exposition of New Testament theology made a tremendous impression, and the notes I took in his classes are the only school notes I still preserve.
>
> Professor Macintosh, the systematic theologian, opened the whole world of philosophical and theological learning to me, lent books to me out of his own library,

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[1] Soper, Major Voices in American Theology, p. 42.

[2] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, pp. 3-4.

> and by his personal interest inspired a raw and timid student who had made his first contact with a great university.[1]

Niebuhr had originally intended to remain at Yale through the completion of a doctorate in the hopes of entering upon an academic career, but changed his mind because of family needs and his general loss of interest in graduate study. According to his own testimony:

> Family needs (my father had died just before my entrance into Yale) and my boredom with epistemology prompted me to foreswear graduate study and the academic career to which it pointed, and to accept a parish of my denomination in Detroit.[2]

Reinhold Niebuhr took up his duties in Detroit, with his mother serving as his "assistant pastor." At that time the automobile industry, in particular the Ford Motor Company, was just starting its rapid expansion, which in a few years made Detroit the motor capital of the nation. During his pastorate of thirteen years in the city, Detroit expanded from a half to a million and a half population. The resulting facts determined his development more than any books which he read. Niebuhr points out that his "congregation grew from a handful to eight hundred souls." He goes on to note that the church itself was "situated on the spacious West Grand Boulevard, and it numbered in the flock everything from auto workers to two millionaires."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 4. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Gradually he came to realize that many of the intellectual problems which had appeared so important in the seminary were not as relevant for his preaching as some of the actual problems which he faced in his day to day ministry. Early in his ministry he saw the conflict between the gospel and the world, and found "it increasingly interesting to set the two in juxtaposition at least in my mind and in the minds of others."[1] Here we see a foreshadowing of his future ethical principle. In 1920 he wrote:

> I am really beginning to like the ministry. I think since I have stopped worrying so much about the intellectual problems of religion and have begun to explore some of its ethical problems there is more of a thrill in preaching.[2]

The actual social condition of a rapidly expanding industrial community forced Niebuhr to reconsider the "liberal and highly moralistic creed" which he had accepted as identical with Christian faith. Although the early years of his pastorate correspond to the war in Europe, according to him "it wasn't the then distant war so much as the social realities in Detroit which undermined my youthful optimism."[3] His first interest did not consist so much in challenging "the reigning laissez-faire philosophy of the community as to 'debunk' the moral pretensions of Henry Ford, whose five-dollar-a-day wage gave him a world-wide reputation for generosity."[1] Niebuhr "happened to know that some of his workers had an inadequate annual wage, whatever the pretensions of the daily wage may have been."[2] He eventually became convinced of "the irrelevance of the mild moralistic idealism," which he had identified with the Christian faith, "to the power realities of our modern technical society."[3]

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[1] Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 27.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 5.

In the meantime the war dissipated other illusions of the nineteenth century world view which was held by American Christians. Writing in 1928, looking back over the war era, Niebuhr could say that "being a German-American I was more than ordinarily patriotic during the war."[4] He had a jealous love for America which created such a resentment against German critics of this country that he forgot his pacifism and "was driven into the arms of the war enthusiasts."[5] When the war broke upon the world he was in Yale Divinity School "trying to build a faith out of the wreck and on the ruins of the creeds of . . . childhood and adolescence."[6] The war revised his whole world-view. The war not only made him a relativist, but it qualified his optimism. It made him a child of the age of disillusionment. He writes:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 6.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, "What the War Did to My Mind," The Christian Century, XLV (September 27, 1928), 1161.

[5] Ibid. [6] Ibid.

> When the war started I was a young man trying to be an optimist without falling into sentimentality. When it ended and the full tragedy of its fratricides had been revealed, I had become a realist trying to save myself from cynicism.[1]

In spite of this strong influence of the war on his thought, he writes: "I was influenced in my disillusionment more by local than by international experience."[2] In his parish duties he found "that the simple idealism into which the classical faith had evaporated was as irrelevant to the crises of personal life as it was to the complex social issues of an industrial city."[3]

During the years immediately following the war, Niebuhr became a strong advocate of pacifism. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and ultimately became its head.[4] He held that "warfare is incompatible with Christianity not so much because of its specific sins as because of its sin of debasing the human soul."[5] Visiting Europe in 1923, he wrote in his diary that "this is as good a time as any to make up my mind that I am done with the war business."[1] As early as 1927, however, he is beginning to have some doubts about the wisdom of the pacifist position. At that time, he asks, "would I be as good a pacifist if I belonged to an unsatisfied nation rather than to a satisfied one?"[2] Somewhat in answer to his own question he states, "perhaps my pacifism is related to the pacifism of the beast of prey whose maw is crammed."[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 6.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Wanted: A Christian Morality," The Christian Century, XL (February 15, 1923), 202.

Up through 1927 Niebuhr may be classified as being chiefly within the Social Gospel fold. This is the year that his first book, Does Civilization Need Religion?, was published. In 1939 he could say of this book that "it contains almost all the theological windmills against which today I tilt my sword." Then he goes on to say that "these windmills must have tumbled shortly thereafter for every succeeding volume expresses a more and more explicit revolt against what is usually known as liberal culture."[4] It is interesting, however, that George Hammar believes that this book "really implies a partial rupture with Rauschenbusch's social gospel, as does also the appearance of the doctrine of grace."[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 47.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why I Am Not a Christian," The Christian Century, XLIV (December 15, 1927), 1482-1483.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Ten Years That Shook My World," The Christian Century, LVI (April 26, 1939), 542.

By the summer of 1928 Niebuhr's break with liberalism, and with what might be termed the "typical" Social Gospel of his day, was well underway. In August he wrote "The Confession of a Tired Radical":

> I hope I will not remain tired. Time may give me new enthusiasms and save me from premature senility. But just now I am fed up. I am fed up with liberals, with their creeds, their idiosyncrasies and their attitudes.[2]

In the late twenties he was instrumental in organizing the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, a group to which he owes much. It developed from a rather tentative Marxist orientation to a position which equally criticized both Marxist and liberal illusions.[3] This development received encouragement from the contact which he and other members of the group had with the growing ecumenical movement starting with the World Conference on Church, Community, and State in Oxford in 1937.[4] Some of the best work of the

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[1] George Hammar, Christian Realism in Contemporary American Theology, (Uppsala, Sweden: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1940), p. 179.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Confession of a Tired Radical," The Christian Century, XLV (August 30, 1928), 1046.

[3] For further information on this development see Christian Faith and Social Action, ed. John A. Hutchison. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

[4] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 8.

Fellowship of Socialist Christians was done by means of its quarterly journal, which first appeared under the title Radical Religion, later changed to Christianity and Society.

Niebuhr became a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in 1928, as he says, "largely at the instigation of my friend Sherwood Eddy, who persuaded the seminary faculty to call me to a Chair of Christian Ethics."[1] He reluctantly left the pastorate, for he writes: "Now that the time has come to sever my connections with the church I find it almost impossible to take the step."[2]

The pressure of academic discipline and his companionship with the outstanding members of the Union faculty served to introduce him to the basic outlines of Biblical faith and to the classical writers of Christian theology. He particularly found the thought of Augustine helpful, for it answered many of his unanswered questions and finally emancipated him from "the notion that the Christian faith was in some way identical with the moral idealism of the past century."[3] Niebuhr is described by D. R. Davies as moving theologically more and more to the right, that is to the side of orthodoxy; and socially more and more to the left, that is toward socialism.[1] This is certainly true, at least through the early thirties until his break with socialism. Writing in 1933, Niebuhr points out that in his opinion "adequate spiritual guidance can come only through a more radical political orientation and more conservative religious convictions than are comprehended in the culture of our era."[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 195.

[3] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 9.

J. Neal Hughley points out that from a close observation of Niebuhr's political and economic views one is able "to see two important phases aside from the rather inchoate liberal social reformism of the early twenties."[3] From approximately 1930 until 1934-35 he turned toward the left, becoming obviously socialist.[4] His socialism was strongly influenced by the Marxist view of historical determinism and social strategy.[5] Hughley notes that "the key books reflecting the move toward this position are The Contribution of Religion to Social Work, Moral Man and Immoral Society, and Reflections on the End of an Era."[1] The second phase of Niebuhr's political thought is revealed by his moving a little to the right of this Marxist emphasis. His later books, beginning with An Interpretation of Christian Ethics in 1935 and continuing through The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness in 1944, show a growing dislike for Marxism and proletarian revolution which gradually becomes quite strong. During this time his thought received a new expression within the light of a realistic theology. This had a definite effect upon his political and economic point of view. A good indication of the change in his thought may be acquired by comparing critically the general trend of Reflections on the End of an Era with that of The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, published ten years later.[2]

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[1] Davies, Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet from America, p. 28 and pp. 30-72.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, Reflections on the End of an Era (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. ix.

[3] J. Neal Hughley, Trends in Protestant Social Idealism (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948), p. 113.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This point is well substantiated by Niebuhr's chapter on "Christian Politics and Communist Religion" in Christianity and the Social Revolution, ed. John Lewis, Karl Polanyi, and Donald K. Kitchin (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 442-472..

In 1930 Niebuhr made a trip to Russia which apparently made a favorable impression on him. This was, of course, during the heart of the depression in the United States, when many intellectuals in America were attracted by the Russian experiment. At that time he made the following comparison between Russia and the West:

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[1] Hughley, Trends in Protestant Social Idealism, p. 113.

[2] Ibid.

> Since the inequalities which industrialism is creating in the western world grow daily more vivid and outrageous, only a callous conscience can view this Russian experiment without sympathy. Nothing is more basic to an ethical society than equality of opportunity, and Russia bids fair to establish it more completely than any western nation.[1]

A strong Marxist emphasis is found in his prediction of 1932 that the "middle-class paradise . . . will be in decay before the half-century mark is rounded." Writing in the same article he expresses his belief that "it will be practically impossible to secure social change in America without the use of very considerable violence."[2] He became an active member of the Socialist Party, supporting Norman Thomas for the Presidency in 1936. The same year he wrote an article in which he said that "socialism is the logical first step in a technical society," and that "modern civilization faces the choice between retrogression or advance to socialism."[3]

Such statements as the above, in which he pointed out that it would be practically impossible to secure social change in this country without the use of violence, soon led to Niebuhr's break with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. In January, 1934, he wrote an article for The Christian Century in which he stated why he left the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It is interesting that at this time he was still pacifist in the sense of refusing to participate in an international armed conflict, but not in regard to using violence to bring about social change. This, of course, shows the strong Marxian influence on his thought. He felt that he was forced to associate himself with the "twenty per cent of the fellowship who are pacifists only in the sense that they will refuse to participate in an international armed conflict."[1] This break with the Fellowship of Reconciliation turned out to be the first step in his total renunciation of the pacifist position, for only a few years later we find him strongly supporting American aid to the Western Allies in their life and death struggle with Fascism.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Land of Extremes," The Christian Century, XLVII (October 15, 1930), 1242.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Catastrophe or Social Control: The Alternatives for America," Harpers, CLXV (June, 1932) 118.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Idea of Progress and Socialism," Radical Religion, I (Spring, 1936), 28.

By the time of the publication of Christianity and Power Politics (1940), Niebuhr had found and gotten rid of his "utopian illusions." Looking back over this era, he writes that "those of us who were critical of capitalism were in short too uncritical of the Marxist alternative, even when we rejected the Communist version of Marxism and espoused the democratic Marxism."[1] As David Soper points out, three famous personages had much to do with the change in Niebuhr's emphasis. Franklin D. Roosevelt's pragmatic effort to bring economic power under social control weakened working-class hatred of capitalism. Then the rise of Mussolini and Hitler indicated that a conflict between freedom and tyranny was only a short distance away.[2]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why I Leave the F. O. R.," The Christian Century, LI (January 3, 1934), 18.

Niebuhr's changed attitude toward the pragmatic economic policies of Roosevelt is of great significance in the development of Niebuhr's social ethics. As a socialist-absolutist he had roundly condemned such pragmatic economic policies. Today these policies have become the very essence of his own social ethics. In regard to this change, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. writes:

> The penetrating critic of the Social Gospel and of pragmatism, he [Niebuhr] ended up, in a sense, the powerful reinterpreter and champion of both. It was the triumph of his own remarkable analysis that it took what was valuable in each, rescued each by defining for each the limits of validity, and, in the end, gave the essential purposes of both new power and new vitality.[3]

Niebuhr's changed attitude toward both capitalism and pacifism made his break with the Socialist Party inevitable. In his own words he tells the story, and the reason behind it:

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Communism and the Clergy," The Christian Century, LXX (August 19, 1953), 937.

[2] Soper, Major Voices in American Theology, p. 45.

[3] Arthur H. Schlesinger, Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in American Political Thought and Life," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 149.

> A letter from the Socialist Party informs me that my views on foreign affairs violate the party platform and asks me to give account of my nonconformity. The party position is that this war is a clash of rival imperialisms in which nothing significant is at stake. . . . I answer the Socialist communication by a quick resignation from the party.[1]

The completeness of his break with the Socialist Party is indicated by the fact that in 1940 for the first time he supported Roosevelt for the presidency. He writes that "it is clear that, whatever reservations some of us may have about some aspects of the Roosevelt administration, we will have to vote for Roosevelt." In the same article he points out that Norman Thomas' "type of idealistic isolationism plays into the hands of reactionary appeasement and that he fails completely to understand the kind of peril which our civilization confronts."[2]

Even before America's entry into the war, Niebuhr became the spokesman of a group of leading churchmen who believed that war could be a lesser evil than tyranny. On February 10, 1941, this group published the first issue of

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), pp. 167-168.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Wilkie and Roosevelt," Christianity and Society, V (Fall, 1940), p. 5.

Christianity and Crisis, an eight-page bi-weekly. It opposed the pacifist slant of existing denominational periodicals, and encouraged Americans to support the cause of freedom. This attack was especially directed at The Christian Century, with which Niebuhr had been in a controversy since his break with pacifism. In the first issue of Christianity and Crisis, Niebuhr pointed out:

> The choice before us is clear. Those who choose to exist like parasites on the liberties which others fight to secure for them will end by betraying the Christian ethic and the civilization which has developed out of that ethic.
>
> If history has any meaning, if ethical considerations have any force, the Protestant clergy of America will in their capacity as citizens be the first to take the lead in informing the people of the nature of the Crisis and in persuading them to put the full resources of America at the disposal of the soldiers of freedom.[1]

In 1939 Niebuhr had the honor of being the fifth American to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. Those before him were William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and William E. Hocking. The lectures were later published in two volumes, Human Nature (1941) and Human Destiny (1943); they may now be purchased in one edition.[2]

Throughout his career Niebuhr has by no means limited himself to the pulpit, the professor's chair, and the lecturer's platform. He took an active part in the organization of the Union for Democratic Action and later of Americans for Democratic Action. He has been chairman of American Friends of German Freedom. As editor of the quarterly, Christianity and Society, he emphasized the unique relevance of the Christian message to the conflicts of our era. Numerous journals have published his articles and begged for more. He is a contributor to The Christian Century, which he once criticized as "the voice of effeminate liberalism." He has been discussed in such leading magazines as The American Scholar, The Christian Century, Newsweek, Time, and Life.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Crisis," Christianity and Crisis, I (February 10, 1941), 2.

[2] Soper, Major Voices in American Theology, p. 46.

In 1931, Reinhold Niebuhr married his former student, Ursula Keppel-Compton, and they now have two children: Christopher Robert and Barbara Elizabeth.[1] Niebuhr, now at sixty-five years of age and in spite of a stroke, is still actively carrying on his teaching responsibilities at Union, as well as his many other interests.

Comparisons and Contrasts Between Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr

Having dealt with Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr separately, I will now point out some of the most important points of comparison and contrast between the two men. Although Niebuhr has now outlived Rauschenbusch by almost forty years, they did share a brief period of history together and have much in common. It is the thesis of this writer that Reinhold Niebuhr owes a real debt to Walter Rauschenbusch, especially in regard to the importance of relating the Christian Gospel to all areas of life. This thesis will increasingly be substantiated throughout this work.

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[1] Ibid., p. 49.

Both men may be spoken of as "sons of the manse," for both of their fathers were scholarly ministers. There is, however, a pietistic touch in the life and writings of Rauschenbusch that is missing with Niebuhr. Perhaps Rauschenbusch's Baptist background partially accounts for this fact. In all fairness to Niebuhr, it must be said that although he does not use a pietistic vocabulary, his whole life testifies to his vital relationship with God and man. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each felt "called" into the ministry while they were in their teens, and each accepted his calling without a long period of struggle and indecision.

Both men were born in this country of German parentage. Walter Rauschenbusch received a large proportion of his education in Germany, especially during his early formative years, while Niebuhr received his education in America, but not without the influence of German thought.

The two men began their careers as pastors of small city churches composed largely of laboring people. Then after a number of years in the pastorate, each accepted an invitation to teach in a seminary, Rauschenbusch at Rochester Theological Seminary and Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary. Rauschenbusch became a professor of Church History, although his major works have been in the area of Christian ethics, and Niebuhr a professor of Applied Christianity, which is the main concern of most of his writing. Their social theories developed largely out of their pastoral experiences, especially in regard to industrial problems. Rauschenbusch set out to "save souls" in the accustomed Baptist manner, but only later came to realize that the whole of society, as well as the individual, needed to be changed. He found support in the Bible for this conviction. Niebuhr, on the other hand, began his ministry under the influence of the Social Gospel as propounded by Rauschenbusch. Just as the spokesmen of the dialectical theology in Europe were aroused by the social-religious movement which preceded them, so was young Niebuhr influenced by Walter Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr has never abandoned the Social Gospel's concern for the application of Christianity to all areas of life.

Niebuhr, however, did discover during his pastorate the inadequacy of much of the theology of the Social Gospel. Just as the exigencies of his situation had driven Rauschenbusch to the Bible to find support for his social convictions, so the exigencies of Niebuhr's ministry drove him to the Bible and classical Christian writers to find enlightenment for his social theories. This study resulted in Niebuhr's development of a realistic social-theological approach to the problems of our day. Both men were strongly influenced by European thought. Rauschenbusch was especially influenced by Friedrick Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolph Harnack, and Charles Darwin; Niebuhr by Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich. The changed theological and scientific climate in Europe, which had such a pronounced influence on the thought of Niebuhr, came too late to influence Rauschenbusch.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr have each been greatly influenced by the thought of Karl Marx, each having become a Christian Socialist. Walter Rauschenbusch, however, never joined the Socialist Party, while Reinhold Niebuhr joined it and became its ardent supporter until he resigned. Today in his economics, Niebuhr may be thought of as a pragmatist who favors a mixed economy.

World War I had a great influence on the thought of each man. For Walter Rauschenbusch, the war came as a severe blow at the very end of his life. He felt that his world had been destroyed and that he could never again be happy in this life. The war also was a shock to Niebuhr, but came so early in his career that it had a creative influence on him. It helped not only to break down his liberal optimism, but also to influence the development of his thought toward a more realistic theological position.

The most important problem faced by Rauschenbusch was that of establishing economic justice in a modern industrial society. He developed the Social Gospel as his answer to this problem. Niebuhr, too, faced this problem. He, however, chose to reformulate the Social Gospel along different lines. Niebuhr has lived through the "Roosevelt Revolution." He recognizes that complete economic justice has still not been achieved in America, but that real progress has been made in that direction. While automation and modern mechanized production continues to threaten individual initiative, pride in workmanship, and job security, yet the living standards of the average man have been raised. The unions are now strongly organized and business men generally accept the principles of collective bargaining. The problem of economic justice is alleviated by our expanding economy.[1]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr and Leland Gordon, Your Christian Conscience and American Abundance (New York: Published by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., 1955), pp. 35-36. For a helpful discussion on the question of automation see "Atoms and Automation: Articles on the Second Industrial Revolution," a special issue of the Saturday Review, XXXVIII (January 22, 1955).

A major economic problem of our day which Rauschenbusch did not face, but which has become of increasing importance to Niebuhr, is that of achieving some kind of justice between rich America and the poorer countries of the world. Today this is a more difficult problem than that of attaining economic justice within our own nation.[1]

Another problem that has become more prominent in recent years is that of the exaltation of material possessions and the neglect of religious discipline in their use. Rauschenbusch faced this problem, but it was rooted in an economy of scarcity, whereas today it is grounded in an economy of abundance. Prosperity tends to make it more difficult to achieve a measure of grace in an economy of abundance in which the productive efficiency is so great that we are tempted to consume excessively. This is a post-World War II problem about which Niebuhr is becoming more and more concerned.[2]

Although Walter Rauschenbusch's thought is primarily centered on industrial problems, he is also concerned for what is perhaps Niebuhr's greatest present interest, that of international relations. With the coming of World War I, this became a major problem for Rauschenbusch, but it never achieved the prominence in his thought that it has for Niebuhr. The latter has tried to show the relevance of

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 36-37.

[2] _Ibid._, pp. 37-40.

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Christianity to such complicated international problems as World War II, the United Nations, world government, and atomic and hydrogen warfare.

Another problem that is now far more prominent than in the time of Rauschenbusch is that of racial integration. It has recently been brought to a climax by the Supreme Court's decision outlawing segregation in the schools. Rauschenbusch has comparatively little to say in all his writings on this all important question, which today is of more current interest than economic problems. What he does say, however, indicates that he was in sympathy with the Negro, and that had he lived he would have given his full support to the Supreme Court's decision. Niebuhr has been greatly concerned with this problem and has written innumerable articles in which he has severely criticized racial discrimination and urged implementation of the Supreme Court's decision.

In this chapter the primary and secondary purposes of the dissertation have been stated. The relevant historical factors of the period from 1861 to 1957 are presented and the primary problems of this period are pointed out. The lives of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr have been sketched with special emphasis on the development of their thought. Then some of the main points of comparison and contrast between the two men are set forth.

CHAPTER II

MAN AS UNDERSTOOD BY WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr agree on the major premise that both man and society stand in need of salvation. There are points both of agreement and disagreement on the question of what man's condition in society actually is. In this chapter each thinker's understanding of man, including some of his basic presuppositions, will be presented. Then their agreements and disagreements in regard to both their doctrines of man and their basic presuppositions will be summarized. In giving each thinker's doctrine of man, his own outline will be followed.

I. MAN AS UNDERSTOOD BY WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

A. Basic Presuppositions

In his chief theological work, A Theology for the Social Gospel, Rauschenbusch points out that he is "not a doctrinal theologian either by professional training or by personal habits of mind."[1] He recognizes, however, the need for a book which would present a theology for the Social Gospel.[1] This task he undertakes after first acknowledging the relativity of many theological formulations. In this regard, he writes:

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, Foreword.

> Theology needs periodical rejuvenations. Its greatest danger is not mutilation but senility. . . . The dogmas and theological ideas of the early Church were needed to hold the Church together, to rally its forces, and to give it victorious energy against antagonistic powers. Today many of these ideas are without present significance.[2]

Rauschenbusch particularly avoids the more speculative doctrines of the Church, for he believes that the interests of the Social Gospel "lie on earth, within the social relations of the life that now is."[3] He maintains that it is primarily concerned with "the eradication of sin and the fulfillment of the mission of redemption."[4] The two sections of theology which ought to express the Social Gospel most effectively, therefore, are the doctrines of sin and redemption.[5]

An analysis of Rauschenbusch's thought reveals four basic presuppositions which determine both his theology and his social ethics: (1) the centrality of the teachings of Jesus and the prophets, (2) the importance of Christian experience, (3) the immanence of God in the world and in man, and (4) the doctrine of evolution combined with the nineteenth century's assumption of process and progressive development.

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[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[3] Ibid., p. 31.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

(1) According to Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel is "the oldest gospel of all."[1] The basis for this belief is that "it is 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.'"[2] Its substance is found in "the Hebrew faith which Jesus himself held."[3] The Social Gospel is not "alien or novel." As to pedigree and birth-right, it may well question "the dogmas on which the Catholic and Protestant theologies are based and inquire for their birth certificate."[4] Such dogmas are "neither dominant in the New Testament nor clearly defined in it."[5] The roots of Catholic dogma run back into alien Greek thought, and "not into the substance of Christ's message nor into Hebrew faith."[6] On this point, Rauschenbusch agrees with Harnack's central proposition that "the development of Catholic dogma was the process of the Hellenization of Christianity."[7] These alien influences came "into the religion of Jesus Christ and created a theology which he never taught nor intended."[8] Rauschenbusch asks: "What would Jesus have said to the symbol of Chalcedon or the Athanasian Creed if they had been read to him?"[9]

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[1] Ibid., p. 24. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 25.
[5] Ibid. [6] Ibid. [7] Ibid. [8] Ibid. [9] Ibid.

Throughout his writings Rauschenbusch frequently tests traditional Christian doctrines by the standard of the teachings of Jesus and the prophets. The writings of Paul are played down in Rauschenbusch's effort to build the theology of the Social Gospel on Jesus and the prophets. Rauschenbusch assumes the authenticity of the recorded words of Jesus and the prophets. Among the words of Jesus and the prophets Rauschenbusch stresses those words which he feels are of greatest value to his social ethics. The Sermon on the Mount and Jesus's teachings on the Kingdom of God are of central importance. The demand of the prophets for social righteousness is the main element in the writings of the prophets which Rauschenbusch finds of significance. These facts should be kept in mind as a more detailed study of Rauschenbusch is undertaken, and especially as he is compared with Niebuhr.

(2) The second basic presupposition of Walter Rauschenbusch which determines his theology and his social ethics is the vital role of religious experience in their formulation. He asks us to "consider the men who have turned theological thought into new channels -- Paul, Augustine, Luther, Fox, Wesley, Schleiermacher."[1] Rauschenbusch stresses the point that "these were all men who had experienced God at first hand and while under the pressure of

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

new problems."[1] He goes on to state that "then they generalized on the basis of their experience."[2] Rauschenbusch visualizes the new theology of Paul as "a product of fresh religious experience and of practical necessities."[3] Luther's experience under Catholic legalism enabled him to understand Paul. Luther brought to life the Pauline theology, "built a theology of emancipation on that, and threw out of religious practice and thought what was not in agreement with his experience and its formula."[4]

Rauschenbusch affirms that "the rank and file of us have no genius and can not erect our personal experience into a common standard."[5] We do, however, use our early experiences as a "kind of guide by which we test what seems to have truth and reality."[6] Rauschenbusch's position on this matter is made clear in the following quotation:

> We select those theoretical ideas which agree with our experience, and are cold to those which never entered into our life. When such a selective process is exercised by many active minds, who all act on the same lines, the total effect on theological thought is considerable. This is a kind of theological referendum, a democratic change in theology on the basis of religious experience.[7]

The above statements clearly indicate Rauschenbusch's indebtedness to Friedrich Schleiermacher who stressed the vital role of religious experience in the formulation of theology. One of the greatest weaknesses in Rauschenbusch's acceptance of Schleiermacher's emphasis on religious experience is the fact that in Rauschenbusch's stress on individual religious experience, he fails to give adequate consideration to the religious experience of the Christian community in both the present and the past.

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[1] *Ibid.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*, p. 21. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.* [7] *Ibid.*

(3) Rauschenbusch's belief in the immanence of God is of the utmost significance for both his theology and his social ethics. It would be impossible to understand either Rauschenbusch's theology or his social ethics apart from an understanding of what he means by the immanence of God. Among his four basic presuppositions, this is the one on which Rauschenbusch differs most with Niebuhr. With Niebuhr the transcendence of God far outweighs His immanence, while the reverse is true with Rauschenbusch. It is the conviction of this writer that the problem of immanence versus transcendence or continuity versus discontinuity is one of the basic problems which underlies all the more obvious differences between the two men. This problem may be thought of as a thread which runs completely through both their theology and their social ethics. The fact of this major difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr will be increasingly substantiated throughout this thesis.

Rauschenbusch's belief in the immanence of God is clearly reflected in his doctrine of man. Man is of value because God is immanent within him. For Rauschenbusch, "God is not only the spiritual representative of humanity; he is identified with it."[1] In God "we live and move and have our being."[2] Although the chief emphasis of Rauschenbusch is on the immanence of God, he does not fail to point out the transcendence of God. It is important to keep this fact in mind for Rauschenbusch has been accused of being a pantheist.[3] It must also be kept in mind that because of Niebuhr's emphasis on the transcendence of God, he has been accused of not believing in an actual redemptive working of God in history.[4]

In regard to the transcendence of God, Rauschenbusch writes: "In us he [God] lives and moves, though his being transcends ours."[5] It must be pointed out, however, that as the major part of Niebuhr's writings stresses the transcendence of God, so the major part of Rauschenbusch's writings stresses the immanence of God. The importance of the immanence of God to Rauschenbusch is clearly revealed in the following quotation:

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[1] Ibid., p. 49. [2] Ibid.

[3] W. A. Visser 't Hooft, The Background of the Social Gospel in America (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1928), p. 178.

[4] Daniel D. Williams, "Niebuhr and Liberalism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 207.

[5] Rauschenbusch, A. Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 49.

> He [God] is the life and light in every man and the mystic bond that unites us all. He is the spiritual power behind and beneath all our aspirations and achievements. He works through humanity to realize his purposes, and our sins block and destroy the Reign of God in which he might fully reveal and realize himself. Therefore our sins against the least of our fellow-men in the last resort concern God. Therefore when we retard the progress of mankind, we retard the revelation of the glory of God. Our universe is not a despotic monarchy, with God above the starry canopy and ourselves down here; it is a spiritual commonwealth with God in the midst of us.[1]

(4) Darwin's theory of evolution combined with the nineteenth century's assumption of process and progressive development exerted a tremendous influence on the theology and social ethics of Rauschenbusch. Though Niebuhr like Rauschenbusch accepts the theory of evolution and recognizes that both the universe and human history undergo continuous change, he does not regard cultural change on the moral and religious level as a progressive development. For Niebuhr, evolution is primarily a scientific theory; for Rauschenbusch, it is a basic philosophical and theological principle which undergirds all being and therefore is the clue to understanding both man himself and his history. Rauschenbusch finds the scientific doctrine of evolution particularly helpful when it comes to explaining the transmission of sin. He believes that "science, to some extent, corroborates the doctrine of original sin."[2] Evil has flowed "down the generations through the channels of biological coherence."[3] The doctrine of evolution teaches

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[3] *Ibid.*

that "faulty equipment has come down to us through the reproductive life of the race."[1] Rauschenbusch writes:

> According to evolutionary science the impulses connected with our alimentary and reproductive organs run far back in the evolution of the race and are well established and imperious, whereas the social, altruistic, and spiritual impulses are of recent development and relatively weak.[2]

Rauschenbusch does not insist that his readers accept Darwin's theory of evolution, but personally he finds it helpful in understanding the nature of man and his need for salvation.[3]

The influence of the nineteenth century's concept of progressive development is reflected in Rauschenbusch's view of the coming of the Kingdom of God. He writes:

> Since the first century the divine Logos has taught us the universality of Law, and we must apply it to the development of the Kingdom of God. It is the untaught and pagan mind which sees God's presence only in miraculous and thundering action; the more Christian our intellect becomes, the more we see God in growth. By insisting on organic development we shall follow the lead of Jesus when, in his parables of the sower and of the seed growing secretly, he tried to educate his disciples away from catastrophes to an understanding of organic growth.[4]

B. The Fall of Man

Since Rauschenbusch denies that the Fall is a past historical event, the traditional doctrine of the Fall has in his view practically no importance for the present. He tries to demonstrate its insignificance by showing that it was not stressed by either Jesus or the prophets.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 59. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 58. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 225

Rauschenbusch's understanding of the Fall reveals one of the major differences between him and Niebuhr. While Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch's opposition to the Fall as an event in history, Niebuhr interprets it differently. Rauschenbusch tends to de-emphasize traditional doctrines which he can no longer accept in their traditional form or else to reinterpret them rationally in the light of modern thought. Niebuhr, on the other hand, takes such traditional doctrines as the Fall and reinterprets them symbolically or mythologically, thus showing what he believes to be their essential meaning apart from their literal interpretation.[1]

These two divergent approaches to traditional doctrines raise a vital point about the ultimate source of theological ideas. Although Rauschenbusch thinks that he is depending upon the Bible for his basic theological concepts, in reality he reads nineteenth-century liberal theological and philosophical presuppositions into the Bible. He uses reason as the ultimate norm by which to decide what in the Bible or in experience he wishes to maintain in his theology. Since his major concern is social justice, he finds value in the Bible primarily in those passages in the prophets and the Gospels which can be used to support his social ethics. Other Biblical truths, such as the Pauline doctrine of man, are largely ignored. Niebuhr, on the other hand strives to derive not only his ultimate norm of Biblical interpretation, but also his understanding of creation, history, man, and God, from the Bible. This comprehension is mythical, not literal, so that Niebuhr has no quarrel with any scientific doctrine; nevertheless, he tries to base his answer to every basic question of human origin and destiny on what he believes to be the "Biblical point of view" found in the major Biblical "myths." His norm, in the light of which he interprets the Bible, experience, and reason, is God's revelation of Himself centered in the death of Christ on the cross. By using basic Biblical categories to formulate "mythically" his doctrine of creation, Niebuhr maintains its religious meaning without denying the scientific value of the theory of evolution. He is able to find meaning in history only through the revelation of God in Christ which solves the problem of how sinful man is to come into a right relation with God and how history is to conquer the consequences of its "false eternals."[1] Niebuhr's understanding of man as a being who is finite; yet, free and created in the image of God, with powers of self-transcendence, is also Biblically derived. Finally, Niebuhr's concept of God is based, not upon evolutionary and immanistic thought, but upon the Biblical witness to a God who, though transcendent, continues to sustain and redeem his creation.[1]

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[1] The difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr in their approach to such doctrines as the Fall is at least partially accounted for by the influence of such Continental theologians as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner on the thought of Niebuhr.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. I: Human Nature (one vol. ed. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 147. For a detailed discussion of Niebuhr's view of the problem of history, see the discussion on "The Problem of Salvation" in Chapter III of this thesis.

In approaching the problem of the Fall of man, Rauschenbusch emphasizes the importance of realizing that "the story of the fall is incomparably more fundamental in later theology than it was in biblical thought."[2] He points out that "there are scarcely any allusions to the story in the Old Testament."[3] As to the prophets, they were "deeply conscious of the sins of men, but they did not base their teachings on the doctrine of the fall."[4] As to the sayings of Jesus, Rauschenbusch writes:

> In the synoptic sayings of Jesus there is not even a reference to the fall of Adam. In the fourth gospel there is one allusion, (John viii,44). Jesus, of course, had the clearest consciousness of the chasm between

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[1] In his use of the Bible, Niebuhr is careful to maintain the distinction between special and general revelation. This distinction tends to disappear in the thought of Rauschenbusch. For a discussion of Niebuhr's view of revelation, including his use of symbol and myth, see the section of this chapter on Niebuhr's basic presuppositions.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 39.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[4] *Ibid.*

> the will of God and the actual condition of mankind. The universality of sin was a matter of course with him; it was presupposed in all his teaching. But he was concerned only with those sources of sin which he saw in active work about him: first, the evil heart of man from which all evil words and actions proceed; second, the social stumbling blocks of temptation which make the weak to fall; and third, the power of the Kingdom of Evil. On the other hand the first origin of evil seems to have been so distant in his mind that it did not readily slip into any discussions of sin which are preserved to us. His interest was practical and not speculative, religious and ethical and not philosophical.[1]

Rauschenbusch holds that the story of the Fall does not come into prominence in the Bible until we come to the writings of Paul. The patristic writers then took these passages and discovered far more meaning in them than they actually contained. Rauschenbusch states:

> He [Paul] twice (Romans v and I Corinthians xv) set over against each other the carnal humanity descended from Adam . . . and the spiritual humanity descended from Christ. . . .These passages belong to the theological portions of Paul's writings and were eagerly seized by the patristic writers as congenial raw material for their work.
>
> When once theology concentrated on the story it was expanded by exegetical inferences, by allegorical embellishments, and by typology, until it conveyed far more than it actually contained.[2]

Rauschenbusch concludes that there are primarily two different methods of dealing with the story of the Fall. One is that of traditional theology which "has built its entire scheme of thought on the doctrine of the fall."[3] The other is that of Jesus and the prophets who "paid little or no attention to it."[4]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., pp. 40-41. [3] Ibid., p. 41.

[4] Ibid.

According to Rauschenbusch, two things seem to follow from the above discussion:

> First, that the traditional doctrine of the fall is the product of speculative interest mainly, and that the most energetic consciousness of sin can exist without drawing strength from this doctrine. Second, that if the substance of Scriptural thought, the constant and integral trend of biblical convictions, is the authoritative element in the Bible, the doctrine of the fall does not seem to have as great an authority as it has long exercised.[1]

Rauschenbusch affirms that "the traditional doctrine of the fall has taught us to regard evil as a kind of unvarying racial endowment."[2] He believes that the Social Gospel would have greater appeal "if evil could be regarded instead as a variable factor in the life of humanity, which it is our duty to diminish for every young life and for every new generation."[3] This last statement is of particular significance for an understanding of Rauschenbusch's social ethics in comparison to that of Niebuhr's developed position. Rauschenbusch holds to the possibility of overcoming sin in both the life of the individual and in the institutions of society, while Niebuhr holds that every act of both the individual and the institutions of society is tinged with sin. This means that Rauschenbusch expects far more in the way of moral and social achievement than does Niebuhr. Rauschenbusch's position on the Fall is well summed up by the following statement:

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 41-42. [2] _Ibid_., p. 43. [3] _Ibid_.

> They [conservative Christians] can not be going far wrong if they take the attitude taken by the Hebrews prophets and by Jesus himself, concentrating their energies on the present and active sources of evil and leaving the question of the first origin of evil to God. On that basis it is possible to preach both an individualistic and a social gospel with full effectiveness.[1]

A vital point of comparison between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is indicated by each man's attitude toward the doctrine of the Fall. Rauschenbusch de-emphasized it because he believed that it caused people to "regard evil as a kind of unvarying racial endowment." Many of the Christians who in the time of Rauschenbusch accepted the traditional doctrine of the Fall used the doctrine as their reason for opposing social reform. Rauschenbusch wanted men to regard evil as a variable factor in the life of man which could be diminished. If this happened, he believed that men would no longer accept evil without endeavoring to correct it. He saw the source of evil not so much within man as in the outward circumstances which prompt men to sin. If these could be corrected, then evil itself would be greatly reduced.

Niebuhr emphasizes the doctrine of the Fall. He does this because he believes that it is a true expression of the religious depth of sin, and of the fact that all men are involved in sin. Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch's emphasis on the corporate nature of sin and is thus at least partially indebted to him for this insight. Niebuhr, however, in his emphasis on the doctrine of the Fall stands opposed to Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr believes that by deemphasizing the dectrine of the Fall, Rauschenbusch has failed to discern the religious depth of sin. This is why he falls into the fallacy of believing that evil will be greatly reduced if the outward circumstances which tempt men to sin are corrected.

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[1] Ibid., p. 44.

C. The Nature of Sin

It would be impossible to understand the social ethics of either Rauschenbusch or Niebuhr apart from an understanding of their doctrines of sin. Both men acknowledge the complexity of sin, but differ in their analysis of it. Significant points of comparison between the two doctrines of sin will be noted in the course of this study.

Rauschenbusch points out that sin's "quality, degree, and culpability vary according to the moral intelligence and maturity of the individual, according to his social freedom, and his power over others."[1] He then makes a statement which might well have been aimed at Niebuhr had Rauschenbusch been acquainted with Niebuhr's thought. Rauschenbusch states that "theologians have erred . . .by fitting their definitions to the most highly developed forms of sin and then spreading them over germinal and semisinful actions and conditions."[1] He thus does not think of every act as being tinged by sin as does Niebuhr.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Rauschenbusch observes that "every child is born a kicking little egotist and has to learn by its own mistakes and sins to coordinate itself with the social life of every successive group which it enters."[2] He affirms that the "human animal is naturally lazy, sluggish, and inclined to live for today."[3] In thus recognizing the sin of sloth Rauschenbusch points out a form of sin which is easy to overlook in this aggressive twentieth century. In his understanding of sin Rauschenbusch often stresses the physical basis of sinful acts. He writes:

> We are equipped with powerful appetites. We are often placed in difficult situations, which constitute overwhelming temptations. We are all relatively ignorant, and while we experiment with life, we go astray. Some of our instincts may become rampant and overgrown, and then trample on our inward freedom. We are gifted with high ideals, with a wonderful range of possibilities, with aspiration and longing, and also weighted with inertia and moral incapacity to achieve. We are keenly alive to the call of the senses and the pleasures of the moment, and only dimly and occasionally conscious

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[1] _Ibid_.

[2] Rauschenbusch, _Christianizing the Social Order_, p. 126.

[3] Walter Rauschenbusch, _The Social Principles of Jesus_ (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1916), p. 73.

> of our own higher destiny, of the mystic value of personality in others, and of God.[1]

In sharp contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch believes that man's moral delinquencies result from his sensual equipment, ignorance and inertia. He states:

> This sensual equipment, this ignorance and inertia, out of which our moral delinquencies sprout, are part of our human nature. We did not order it so. Instead of increasing our guilt, our make-up seems to entitle us to the forbearing judgment of every onlooker, especially God. Yet no doubt we are involved in objective wrong and evil; we frustrate our possibilities; we injure others; we disturb the divine harmonies. We are unfree, unhappy, conscious of a burden which we are unable to lift or escape.[2]

The last sentence of the above paragraph, which was written in 1917, is indicative of the pessimistic mood which fell over Rauschenbusch at the beginning of World War I. In his last book, A Theology for the Social Gospel, he is not nearly as optimistic as in his earlier writings. Thus, in his more mature thought, Rauschenbusch is closer to the earthly pessimism of Niebuhr than were many of Rauschenbusch's followers during the twenties and thirties.

In regard to the problem of the relation between sin and guilt, Rauschenbusch states that "sin becomes guilt in the full sense in the degree in which intelligence and will enter."[3] This of course means that the man who knows the right, but yet purposely chooses the wrong is more guilty than the one who ignorantly does the wrong.

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 45.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Two things strike Rauschenbusch as he considers the development of sin from its early leaves to its blossom and fruit:

> First, that the element of selfishness emerges as the character of sin matures. Second, that in the higher forms of sin it assumes the aspect of a conflict between the selfish Ego and the common good of humanity; or, expressing it in religious terms, it becomes a conflict between self and God.
>
> The three forms of sin, -- sensuousness, selfishness, and godlessness, -- are ascending and expanding stages, in which we sin against our higher self, against the good of men, and against the universal good.[1]

The above three forms of sin as listed by Rauschenbusch are in exactly the opposite order of causation from which Niebuhr would have listed them. As will be indicated in the discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of sin, he affirms that the basic sin of man is his unbelief. Because man refuses to believe in God, he becomes guilty of pride (rebellion against God), selfishness and sensuousness.

Rauschenbusch is quite critical of the orthodox definition of sin as rebellion against God. Niebuhr, however, finds this definition of sin most helpful. Rauschenbusch writes:

> Theology pictures the self-affirmation of the sinner as a sort of solitary duel of the will between him and God. . . . Now, in actual life such titanic rebellion against the Almighty is rare. . . . We do not rebel; we dodge and evade. We kneel in lowly submission and kick our duty under the bed while God is not looking.

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 46-47.

> The theological definitions of sin have too much the flavour of the monarchical institutions under the spiritual influence of which they were first formed. . . . When theological definitions speak of rebellion against God as the common characteristic of all sin, it reminds one of the readiness of despotic governments to treat every offence as treason.[1]

It may seem that Rauschenbusch, who objects to the definition of sin as rebellion, and who says that rebellion against God is rare, is at odds with Niebuhr, who not only has a strong preference for that term, but regards rebellion against God as universally prevalent. Rauschenbusch, however, is here speaking of rebellion in the narrow dictionary sense of open defiance of constituted authority. Niebuhr too would grant the rarity of such flagrant defiance of the Almighty. But Rauschenbusch also defines rebellion as setting one's own "profit and ambition above the welfare of our fellows and above the Kingdom of God."[2] According to this definition, rebellion is common. Niebuhr's conception of rebellion as pride (self-centeredness) is not far removed from this definition of Rauschenbusch. Both men attempt to define rebellion so as not to encourage man in his evasion of responsibility for others. Niebuhr, on the one hand, points out how rebellion against God leads to the mistreatment of man, and Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, insists that rebellion is the neglect of service to others.[3]

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 47-48. [2] _Ibid._, p. 48.

[3] For a discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of sin, see the section in this chapter on Niebuhr's view of man as a sinner.

Rauschenbusch places his primary emphasis on sin as being "essentially selfishness."[1] This definition is more in harmony with his social ethics than a more individualistic definition of sin would be. He reasons as follows:

> The sinful mind . . . is the unsocial and anti-social mind. To find the climax of sin we must not linger over a man who swears, or sneers at religion, or denies the mystery of the trinity, but put our hands on social groups who have turned the patrimony of a nation into the private property of a small class, or have left the peasant labourers cowed, degraded, demoralized, and without rights in the land. When we find such in history, or in present-day life, we shall know we have struck real rebellion against God on the higher levels of sin.[2]

Rauschenbusch is convinced that if a person is to have a clear realization of the nature of sin it is necessary to have a clear vision of the Kingdom of God. The reign of organized wrong cannot properly be felt and known unless it is constantly seen over against the reign of organized righteousness. Rauschenbusch observes that "where the religious conception of the Kingdom of God is wanting, men will be untrained and unfit to see or to estimate the social manifestations of sin."[3]

He finds that the definition of sin as selfishness is completely in line with the Social Gospel. The latter can support the old theology with outstanding examples of "high-powered selfishness" which have been neglected. Such examples will create a more searching consciousness of sin in the mind of every Christian. It may well be that "many a Christian man, surveying the chief ambitions and results of his life in the light of the Kingdom of God, will have to begin his repentance over again and cry, Mea culpa."[1] Rauschenbusch concludes:

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[1] Ibid., p. 50. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 52.

> If theology absorbs this understanding of the nature of sin, it will become a strong intellectual support of the social gospel, and come into fuller harmony with the spirit of the prophets and of the teachings of Jesus. The social gospel is part of the "return to Christ."[2]

D. The Transmission of Sin

One of the most significant contributions that Rauschenbusch has made to the social ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr is in the area of the transmission of sin. According to Rauschenbusch, the transmission of sin is by no means an academic question. It is his opinion that "theology ought to be the science of redemption and offer scientific methods for the eradiction of sin."[3] One must inquire for the lines of communication and contagion which are used by sin to run "vertically down through history, and horizontally through the strata of contemporary society."[4] Traditional theology has dealt with this problem in the dogma of original sin. Rauschenbusch also affirms a doctrine of original sin, but it is a modernized version of the old doctrine in that it is based largely on modern science. He finds the value of the traditional doctrine of original sin to lie in the fact that "it is one of the few attempts of individualistic theology to get a solidaristic view of its field of work."[1] As to the support that science gives to the doctrine of original sin, Rauschenbusch writes:

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[1] Ibid., p. 56.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 57.

[4] Ibid.

> Science, to some extent, corroborates the doctrine of original sin. Evil does flow down the generations through the channels of biological coherence. Idiocy and feeblemindedness, neurotic disturbances, weakness of inhibition, perverse desires, stubborness and anti-social impulses in children must have had their adequate biological causes somewhere back on the line, even if we lack the records.[2]

Rauschenbusch believes that there is some truth in the unpopular doctrine of original sin, but that the old theology overworked it. The weakness in the traditional formulation of the doctrine of original sin is that "it fixed on us all a uniform corruption, and made it so complete that all evil resulting from personal sins seems trivial and irrelevant."[3] Rauschenbusch asks:

> If our will is so completely depraved, where do we get the freedom on which alone responsibility can be based? If a child is by nature set on evil, hostile to God, and a child of the devil, what is the use of education? For education presupposes an appetite for good which only needs awakening, direction, and spiritual support.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 58

[3] Ibid., p. 59

[4] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch feels that orthodoxy rightly emphasizes the biological transmission of evil on the basis of racial solidarity. He points out that, on the other hand, orthodoxy "slighted or overlooked the fact that sin is transmitted along lines of social tradition."[1] From the point of view of Rauschenbusch this channel is certainly as important as the other and far more sensitive to religious influence and control. Original sin tends to be primarily concerned with the dumb forces of nature while social tradition is ethical and may be influenced by conscious social action.[2]

The doctrine of original sin is recognized by Rauschenbusch as an important effort to see sin in its totality and to understand its unbroken transmission and perpetuation. Such an explanation of the facts, however, is very fragmentary, and even harmful because it concentrates on the biological transmission of evil. It diverts the minds of men from the power of social transmission and from such influence as that of economic profit in the defense and propagation of evil. These are ethical facts of great religious importance. Rauschenbusch believes that there is real reason to focus attention on the social transmission and perpetuation of sin "because the ethical and religious forces can really do something to check and prevent the transmission of sin along social channels."[1] He notes that the biological transmission of original sin, on the other hand, "except for the possible influence of eugenics, seems to be beyond our influence."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 59-60. [2] Ibid., p. 60.

E. The Super-Personal Forces of Evil

Rauschenbusch sees social evil embodied in super-personal forces of evil, as well as in individual men who deliberately choose the wrong. By a super-personal force of evil he means any institution, community, group or organization which acts as a body in contrast to individual persons who act as individuals. He is indebted for his idea of super-personal forces to Josiah Royce, who held that communities have definite mental existence apart from the individuals who compose them. Such forces as churches, political parties, social organizations, business groups, and labor unions can become evil.[3] According to Rauschenbusch, "evil is socialized, institutionalized, and militant."[4] Christianity stands in need of a more adequate understanding of the power of the group.[5] Rauschenbusch observes that "the community is particeps criminis with the individual in almost every sin that is committed."[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 67-68. [2] Ibid., p. 68.

[3] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[4] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p.175.

[5] Ibid., p. 160.

Rauschenbusch is of the opinion that evil collective forces practically always have fallen from a better estate. It is rare for an organization to be formed for an avowed evil end. Organizations "drift into evil under sinister leadership, or under pressure of need or temptation."[2] The higher the institution, the greater the fall when it does go wrong. Rauschenbusch is convinced that the most disastrous backsliding in history is seen in the deterioration of the Church. He writes that "the Church, which was founded on democracy and brotherhood," became the "chief check on the advance of democracy and brotherhood."[3] The duty of the Church was "to bring love, unity and freedom to mankind; instead it created division, fomented hatred, and stifled intellectual and social liberty."[4]

Rauschenbusch notes that the governments of great states are capable of becoming super-personal powers of sin. Governments often fall under the control of groups of men who use their fellow-men as pawns and tools. Rauschenbusch points out that "such governments have in the past waged war for dynastic and class interests without consulting the people; and that in their diplomacy they have cunningly contrived plans of deception and aggression."[1] Rauschenbusch believes that these charges accurately characterize the German government of World War I.[2]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 360.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 72.

[3] Ibid., p. 73.

[4] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

He is confident that the Social Gospel recognizes the importance and power of the super-personal forces in the community. It awakens the social conscience of the nation to the danger of permitting such forces to become parasitic and oppressive. Rauschenbusch writes:

> A realization of the spiritual power and value of these composite personalities must get into theology, otherwise theology will not deal adequately with the problem of sin and of redemption, and will be unrelated to some of the most important work of salvation which the coming generations will have to do.[3]

By emphasizing the spiritual power and value of the super-personal forces in the world Rauschenbusch has made a real contribution to the social ethics of Niebuhr. This fact will be increasingly realized as Niebuhr's own thought is discussed.

F. The Kingdom of Evil

In contrast to the Kingdom of God, Rauschenbusch presents a concept of a Kingdom of Evil which has real existence in the world. This is not, however, to be thought of in any personalistic way as a demonic or satanic kingdom such as is found in traditional theology. Instead, it is composed of those laws, customs, and institutions which protect evil and evil-doers. Whereas the Kingdom of God emphasizes organized righteousness, the Kingdom of Evil emphasizes organized wrong. It is the solidarity of both individual and corporate sinfulness in society as opposed to both individual and corporate rightfulness.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 75

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

The Kingdom of Evil is to be found, for example, in those laws which maintain segregation for the benefit of the white race and to the disadvantage of the Negro. It is discovered in those customs and precedents which encourage a nation to settle its disputes by war rather than by peaceful means.

Rauschenbusch affirms that there is a permanent force of organized evil in the world. In regard to it, he states:

> There is more in sin than our own frailty and stupidity, and the bad influence of other individuals. There is a permanent force of organized evil which vitiates every higher movement. . . . You work hard on some law to reform the ballot . . . in order to protect the freedom and rights of the people, and after three years your device has become a favorite tool of the interests. You found a benevolent institution, and after you are dead, it becomes a nest of graft. . . . Evil is more durable and versatile than youth and optimism imagine. The belief in a satanic power of evil expresses the conviction

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 78-81, and p. 52.

> of the permanent power of evil. In early Christianity the belief in the devil was closely connected with the Christian opposition to the idolatrous and wicked social order for Satan, and the beasts who stand for the despotic Roman Empire, are in close alliance.
>
> What are the satanic social forces today?[1]

Rauschenbusch opposes traditional demonology because he believes that "the devil and his spirits are not real but a figment of social imagination."[2] Rauschenbusch recognizes that in this modern age "we can no longer realize the Kingdom of Evil as a demonic kingdom."[3] He is primarily concerned with maintaining the idea of the Kingdom of Evil as a symbol which stands for such organized forces of evil in the world as the liquor interests, corrupt politicians, and dishonest corporations. He holds that "the belief in a Satanic kingdom, in so far as it was not merely theology but vital religious faith, has always drawn its vitality from political and social realities."[4] Rauschenbusch is interested in maintaining "a solidaristic and organic conception of the power and reality of evil in the world."[5] On this point he writes:

> If we miss that, we shall see only disjointed facts. The social gospel is the only influence which can

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[1] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p. 155.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 84.

[3] Ibid., p. 86.

[4] Ibid., p. 87.

[5] Ibid.

> renew the idea of the Kingdom of Evil in modern minds, because it alone has an adequate sense of solidarity and a sufficient grasp of the historical and social realities of sin. In this modern form the conception would offer religious values similar to those of the old idea, but would not make such drafts on our credulity, and would not invite such unchristian superstitions and phantasms of fear.[1]

From the point of view of Rauschenbusch it is exceedingly important to maintain in the mind of modern man a solidaristic consciousness of sin and evil. In order to do this Rauschenbusch has found it of value to utilize the traditional Christian belief in original sin and demonology. By maintaining in his own theology a solidaristic conception of sin, Rauschenbusch not only strengthened his own social ethics, but made a real contribution to the social ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr. In all fairness, however, it must be pointed out that both men are indebted to Schleiermacher who originally pointed out this solidaristic conception of sin. Both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr have taken this concept of Schleiermacher and developed it further in relation to social ethics. In regard to the Christian belief in original sin and demonology, Rauschenbusch states:

> These two doctrines combined,--the hereditary racial unity of sin, and the supernatural power of evil behind all sinful human action,--created

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[1] *Ibid.*

> a solidaristic consciousness of sin and evil, which I think is necessary for the religious mind. Take away these two doctrines, and both our sense of sin and our sense of the need of redemption will become much more superficial and will be mainly concerned with the transient acts and vices of individuals.[1]

II. MAIN AS UNDERSTOOD BY REINHOLD NIEBUHR

A. Basic Presuppositions

Among theologians it is generally agreed that Nieburh's most significant contribution to the reconstruction of Christian theology in our day is his understanding of the doctrine of man. This one doctrine has become the focal point of his whole thought. William J. Wolf points out that when stated in terms of man's relationship with his fellow men, the doctrine of man determines Niebuhr's social ethics and his interpretation of history. When stated in terms of personality, and harmonized with the historic Christian revelation, it is definitive of his conception of Christology, atonement, and eschatology.[2]

In order to understand Niebuhr's theology and social ethics it is necessary to consider his two basic presuppositions which determine these doctrines.

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[1] Ibid., p. 90.

[2] William John Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 230.

According to Wolf, these two presuppositions are as follows: (1) the need to make an analysis of the human situation, and (2) the need to integrate this analysis with the insights of Christian revelation.[1] Niebuhr combines the two in such a way that they act as a check on each other.

(1) By an analysis of the human situation is meant both an analysis of human conduct and of human history. Niebuhr agrees with the historian[2] who writes that "Christian analyses of human conduct and of human history are truer to the facts of experience than alternative analyses."[3] The need to make an analysis of the human situation is stressed by Niebuhr when he states that "our apologetic task as proponents of the Christian faith must include the analysis of experience which proves alternative faiths to be mistaken."[4] He goes on to point out that "the apologetic task has the object of inducing the confession: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"[5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 232.

[2] Niebuhr does not state who the historian is.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 202.

[4] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 17.

[5] Ibid.

This method developed out of Niebuhr's own personal search for the truth. He writes:

> Since I am not so much scholar as preacher, I must confess that the gradual unfolding of my theological ideas has come not so much through study as through the pressure of world events. Whatever measure of Christian faith I hold today is due to the gradual exclusion of alternative beliefs through world history. As did Peter, I would preface my confession, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," with the question, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Even while imagining myself to be preaching the gospel, I had really experimented with many modern alternatives to Christian faith, until one by one they proved unavailing.[1]

William J. Wolf affirms that the form in which Niebuhr chose to set forth his doctrine of men in the Gifford Lectures indicates his belief "that experience and faith interpenetrate each other on every level." He goes on to point out that "There is . . . no presuppositionless inquiry into the human situation, nor on the other hand a purely revelational answer without organic connection with the structures of man and the fabric of history."[2] The early chapters present an analysis of the history of Western culture from Greece to the present. They endeavor to state the unsolved problems about man which he faces in e very era and philosophy. Then after presenting this historical analysis of Western culture, Niebuhr sets forth his analysis of human conduct. He notes man's creatureliness, his ability to transcend himself, and his pride. Although Niebuhr's analysis of human history and of human conduct comes before the presentation of the Christian answers, it always presupposes that faith.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, "Ten Years That Shook My World," The Christian Century, LVI, 546.

[2] Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man," Reinhold Niebuhr, pp. 232-233.

(2) The second basic presupposition of Niebuhr is his acceptance of the insights of Christian revelation which he integrates with his analysis of the human situation. Revalation is to be understood in two ways: a revelation of God to the individual which is explained in terms of personal religious experience, and a revelation of God by means of social-historical experience. This latter type of revelation is "special" revelation, of which there is a record in Scripture. The first type of revelation Niebuhr defines as "general" revelation, meaning that which is possible for all men apart from a knowledge of the Scripture and the Christian community. Personal religious experience stands in need of the experience of the Christian community to free it from individual caprice. The Christian community, on the other hand, needs the support of private religious

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

experience to give its "special" revelation credibility and a solid foundation.[1]

In regard to revelation, the Bible is central in the thought of Niebuhr. It is his conviction that the dramatic-historical account of the Bible gives "a truer view of both the nobility and the misery of man than all the wisdom of scientists and philosophers."[2] He continues as follows:

> The fact is that the human self can only be understood in a dramatic-historical environment. Any effort to co-ordinate man to some coherence, whether of nature or of reason, will falsify the facts; because the self's freedom, including both its creative and destructive capacities, precludes such co-ordination.[3]

Man is thus best understood in the light of God's "special" revelation. In fact, Niebuhr notes that "a religion of revelation is . . . alone able to do justice to both the freedom and the finiteness of man and to understand the character of the evil in him."[4] Niebuhr points out, however, that "what is true in the Christian religion can be expressed only in symbols which contain a certain degree of provisional and superficial deception."[1] Since symbols are this important to him, it is necessary to know what he means by symbol and myth in order to understand his interpretation of the Bible. According to Hans Hofmann, Niebuhr hold that "myth is the word of God to man, coming to him from beyond the boundaries of human knowledge; it is the word which sets man right, which re-integrates him."[2] Hofmann writes:

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 127.

[2] Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 11.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 127.

> Its form and content belong together, essentially and inseparably; for man himself is ignorant of the actuality of the relation between God and man, and therefore ignorant also of the truth of his own existence in relatedness to God and to his fellowmen. For Niebuhr, therefore, myth is the word of God, spoken in our language in order that man may learn from God that truth which is not an objective thing but the living and reciprocal relatedness of God and men.[3]

Thus according to the thought of Niebuhr, God uses myth as a medium by which to express His relation to men. This means that myth is of the utmost importance in answering the question of meaning in history. Niebuhr writes that "meaning can be attributed to history only by mythology."[4] Such symbols as that of the Second

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 3.

[2] Hans Hofmann, The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, trans. Louise P. Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1956), p. 77.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Niebuhr, Reflections on the End of an Era., p. 123.

Coming of Christ, the last judgment, and the resurrection indicate that men's activities are not meaningless but are related to God's own purpose for mankind.[1] Niebuhr affirms that "every Christian myth, in one way or another, expresses both the meaningfulness and the incompleteness of the temporal world, both the majesty of God and his relation to the world."[2]

For Niebuhr myths are supra-rational. He observes that to refer to the mythical character of a religious concept does not mean to claim that it has "merely subjective significance." On the contrary, he points out that it is to "assert that poetic, or symbolic, or mythical concepts may be true, even though they transcend rational forms."[3] Niebuhr writes:

> Religion . . . is poetry which is believed. Religion seeks mythically to grasp life in its unity and wholeness. This unity and wholeness can never be expressed in terms of complete rationality; for reason only observes and deduces.[4]

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[1] These symbols are discussed in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation in the section which deals with Niebuhr's view of eschatology.

[2] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 7.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Communications: A Reply to Professor Macintosh," The Review of Religion, IV (March, 1940), 305.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Truth in Myths," The Nature of Religious Experience, ed. Julius S. Bixler, Robert L. Calhoun, and H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 119.

Niebuhr believes that the modern mind is offended if it is required to acknowledge as "literally true" symbols which set forth the relation between time and eternity.[1] He is convinced that it is not possible to accept anything in regard to God or eternity as literal truth.[2] In fact, he thinks that "it would not be unfair to say that, in the field of religion, any statement which is literally true has no particular significance."[3]

Niebuhr is concerned with guarding the truth in the **kerygma** of the Christian faith. He endeavors to do this by sharply distinguishing between pre-scientific and permanent myths. Pre-scientific myths are defined as those which "disregard what may have always been known, or have now become known, about the ordered course of events in the world."[4] Such myths should not be defended in this age of modern science. Permanent myths, however, should be maintained. Niebuhr defines them as "those which describe some meaning or reality, which is not subject to exact analysis but can nevertheless be in experience."[1] As to the experience which verifies a permanent myth, he affirms that it "is usually in the realm of history and of freedom beyond the structures and laws of existence."[2] He concludes:

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[1] Niebuhr, "Communications: A Reply to Professor Macintosh," The Review of Religion, IV, 308.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 446.

[3] Niebuhr, "Communications: A Reply to Professor Macintosh," The Review of Religion, IV, 308.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 97.

> That "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" is verifiable in the experience of everyone who experiences the mercy and new life which flows from true repentance in the encounter with God. It is also verifiable by the proofs that alternative methods of explaining or dissolving the mystery and the meaning which governs and surrounds us lead to observable miscalculations in regard to the nature of man and of history. Thus there is a significant distinction between the "myths" with which a pre-scientific world describes natural phenomena and the symbol which is central to the structure of Christian faith, namely, the assertion that a Jesus of Nazareth was the "Son of the living God."[3]

B. Man as Creature, as Created in the Image of God, and as Sinner[4]

In presenting his doctrine of man, Niebuhr follows a Biblical outline which includes man as creature, as created in the image of God, and as sinner. It is his belief that the Christian view of man is sharply distinguished from all alternative views by the way in which it understands and relates three aspects of human life to each other:

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[4] For the purposes of this thesis man as creature is being discussed before man as created in the image of God. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man* Niebuhr discusses man as created in the image of God before man as creature.

> [1] It insists on man's weakness, dependence, and finiteness, on his involvement in the necessities and contingencies of the natural world, without, however, regarding this finiteness as, of itself, a source of evil in man. In its purest form the Christian view of man regards man as a unity of God-likeness and creatureliness in which he remains a creature even in the highest spiritual dimensions of his existence and may reveal elements of the image of God even in the lowliest aspects of his natural life. [2] It emphasizes the height of self-transcendence in man's spiritual stature in its doctrine of "image of God." (3) It affirms that the evil in man is a consequence of his inevitable though not necessary unwillingness to acknowledge his dependence, to accept his finiteness and to admit his insecurity, an unwillingness which involves him in the vicious circle of accentuating the insecurity from which he seeks escape.[1]

1. Man as Creature

When he states that man is a "creature," Niebuhr means that man is involved in, and is part of, the temporal natural process.[2] Man is a creature in every sense, which means that he is a creature in his rational life as well as his physical life. His rational capacities do not compose an external element in his nature which must be separated from the finite and the natural element.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 150. Points one and two are in brackets because their order has been reversed in the quotation.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Biblical Thought and Ontological Speculation in Tillich's Theology," The Theology of Paul Tillich, Vol. I of The Library of Living Theology, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 216.

According to Niebuhr, "the Biblical view is that the finiteness, dependence and the insufficiency of man's mortal life are facts which belong to God's plan of creation and must be accepted with reverence and humility."[2] Even man's collective and national life is involved in the same finiteness. Biblical faith does not regard the fragmentary character of human life as evil because man is seen from "the perspective of a centre of life and meaning in which each fragment is related to the plan of the whole, to the will of God."[3] Evil arises when the fragment strives in its own wisdom to understand the whole or attempts by its own power to realize it. Both man and the lower creatures are dependent upon God for their existence. The influence of Kierkegaard on Niebuhr is seen in the latter's statement that "it is not man's finiteness, dependence and weakness but his anxiety about it which tempts him to sin."[1]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Religion and Action," by Jacques Maritain et al. (University of Pennsylvania Bicentennial Conference, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), p. 101.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 167.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Niebuhr recognizes the basic importance of the Christian doctrine of the goodness of creation for an understanding of man in which human finiteness is stressed but not depreciated. The Bible emphasizes the absolute contrast between the created world and the Creator. This contrast, however, never means that the created world is evil by reason of its dependence.[2]

It is Niebuhr's conviction that the importance of the Christian doctrine of creation for the Christian interpretation of man is really understood in the Christian concept of individuality. The individual is considered as a creature of unlimited possibilities which cannot be fulfilled within terms of his earthly existence. But man's salvation does not mean "the complete destruction of his creatureliness and absorption into the divine."[3] If finite individuality is never regarded as evil in itself, neither is its finiteness obscured. The self always remains finite. Man is always subject to death and destiny. Niebuhr concludes:

> It is always a self, anxious for its life and its universal perspectives qualified by its "here and now" relation to a particular body. Though it surveys the whole world and is tempted to regard its partial transcendence over its body as a proof

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

> of its candidature for divinity, it remains in fact a very dependent self.[1]

Niebuhr's understanding of the creatureliness of man is of particular importance for his social ethics. In contrast to Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr does not believe that man's sin comes from his "lower nature" or creatureliness. As has already been pointed out, Niebuhr stresses the goodness of God's creation including His creation of man. According to Niebuhr, it is not man's finiteness and ignorance which tempts him to sin, but rather his refusal to accept his finiteness and ignorance. Niebuhr, therefore, is convinced that something more is needed for the salvation of man and society than can be found in the higher evolution of the race or in more education for all men. He thus tries to develop a social ethics which will take into consideration the sinfulness of even the most highly developed races.

2. Man as Created in the Image of God

Niebuhr points out the obvious fact that man is

> a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form, allowing them some, but not too much, latitude.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

Niebuhr then proceeds to stress "the other less obvious fact that man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."[1] Man has a rational capacity which involves "the ability to stand outside himself, a capacity for self-transcendence," and "the ability to make himself his own object."[2] He has a quality of spirit which is usually not fully understood or connoted by such terms as "ratio," "nous," or "reason."[3] In Biblical language this unique quality of spirit is termed "the image of God." Niebuhr's view of the image of God may be summed up by stating that it is the capacity of the whole being to relate itself to God.

Niebuhr is convinced that man is free in that he is self-determining. Man can transcend "natural process in such a way as to be able to choose between various alternatives presented to him by the processes of nature."[4] He can even transcend himself so as to choose his total end. In his task of self-determination man is faced with endless potentialities. "He can set no limit to what he ought to be, short of the character of ultimate reality."[1] At the same time, "man is a creature whose life is definitely limited by nature and he is unable to choose anything beyond the bounds set by the creation in which he stands."[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

Although man is free and has the capacity to transcend himself and his world, he does not have the ability "to construct a world of meaning without finding a source and key to the structure of meaning which transcends the world beyond his own capacity to transcend it."[3] Niebuhr contends that the problem of meaning is the basic problem of religion, for it "transcends the ordinary rational problem of tracing the relation of things to each other as the freedom of man's spirit transcends his rational faculties."[4]

To solve the problem, it is necessary to introduce a principle of meaning which will transcend the world of meaning which is to be interpreted. Man becomes involved in idolatry when he uses "some vitality of existence, or even some subordinate principle of coherence as the principle of meaning."[5] Man raises some finite and conditional element of existence into the place of the divine. "He uses something which itself requires explanation as the ultimate principle of coherence and meaning."[1] Niebuhr finds the most obvious forms of idolatry to be those in which the area of meaning is concentrated around a center of natural or historical vitality. Examples of this are found in regard to the life of a tribe or nation which is manifestly contingent and not ultimate. A more covert form of idolatry is that of identifying meaning with rationality. Life and history are filled with contradictions which cannot be settled in terms of rational principles. Niebuhr is convinced that "a mind which transcends itself cannot legitimately make itself the ultimate principle of interpretation by which it explains the relation of mind to the world."[2] Thus it is seen that "the fact of self-transcendence leads inevitably to the search for a God who transcends the world."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 163.

[2] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[3] Ibid., p. 164.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

According to Niebuhr, the real situation is that man, who possesses those qualities designated as "image of God," is unable to be satisfied with a god who is made in his own image. Because he does have the capacity for self-transcendence, man can see "beyond himself sufficiently to know that a projection of himself is not

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[1] Ibid., pp. 164-165. [2] Ibid., p. 165.

[3] Ibid.

God."[1] This does not guarantee that he will not commit idolatry by making God in his own image. The fact is that "man is constantly tempted to the sin of idolatry and constantly succumbs to it because in contemplating the power and dignity of his freedom he forgets the degree of his limitations."[2]

Niebuhr's analysis of the image of God is of the utmost importance for both his doctrine of sin and for his social ethics. His understanding of the image of God presents one of the major points on which he disagrees with Rauschenbusch and which in turn is reflected in their social ethics. While for Rauschenbusch sin is possible because of man's "lower nature," with Niebuhr sin is possible because man is made in the image of God and is thus a free creature with the capacity for self-transcendence. As has been pointed out above, man's ability to transcend himself enables him to raise some finite and conditioned element of existence into the place of the divine. Man then becomes guilty of the sin of idolatry. Niebuhr, therefore, finds that the Christian doctrine of the image of God sheds light on such complicated contemporary problems as those of racial integration and nationalism. A race or a nation may in reality become a man's god.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[2] *Ibid.*

3. Man as Sinner

Although both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree that man is a sinner, they strongly disagree on the source of human sin. As has already been indicated, Rauschenbusch finds the source of human sin to lie to a large extent within man's animal nature which has not as yet reached maturity. Niebuhr, on the other hand, finds that the source of human sin lies not in what man is but rather in his refusal to accept what he is. Neibuhr writes:

> It is not the contradiction of finiteness and freedom from which Biblical religion seeks emancipation. It seeks redemption from sin; and the sin from which it seeks redemption is occasioned, though not caused, by this contradiction in which man stands. Sin is not caused by the contradiction because, according to Biblical faith, there is no absolute necessity that man should be betrayed into sin by the ambiguity of his position, as standing in and yet above nature. But it cannot be denied that this is the occasion for his sin.
>
> Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with universal mind. All of his intellectual and cultural pursuits, therefore, become infected with the sin of pride. Man's pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation. The Bible defines sin in both religious and moral terms. The religious dimension of sin is man's rebellion against God, his effort to usurp the place of God. The moral and social dimension of sin is injustice. The ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice

to other life.[1]

Here is found in a brief but complete statement the heart of Niebuhr's thinking. His understanding of the nature of sin forms the center around which his thought on man and society revolves. Both Niebuhr's theology and his social ethics are undergirded by his doctrine of sin. One of Niebuhr's greatest contributions in the fields of theology and social ethics is his understanding of the nature of sin. This is also one of the key issues on which Niebuhr differs with Rauschenbusch.

Here the relation of human disorder to the problems of society comes to full expression. Sin confronts Niebuhr as the confusion caused voluntarily by man, which is completely contrary to the original order of God. God's order placed man in relationship with God Himself and gave to man real freedom. Man has taken advantage of his freedom by trying to usurp for himself the place of God. The divine order ordained that man should love his fellowmen and thus establish true community in society. Instead of fulfilling God's purpose for him, man, self-willed and self-seeking, breaks the love bond with his fellowmen, and in his lust for power subjects them to his own selfish desires. This in turn provokes the anger of other men who endeavor to bring about his own overthrow and destruction. Thus instead of establishing a true community, man succeeds in founding a society which ends in total war and anarchy. Seeing society in this condition, Niebuhr has endeavored to create a social ethics which will realistically deal with the contemporary social situation. He feels that the social ethics of Rauschenbusch is not sufficiently realistic to deal with the true condition of man and society.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

Rauschenbusch tends to find the explanation of religious doctrines in morality whereas for Niebuhr religious ideas are the foundation of moral and social problems. Rauschenbusch does not understand the religious dimension of sin which is set forth by Niebuhr in terms of man's unbelief which leads to rebellion against God, his attempt to usurp the place of God. Although Rauschenbusch recognized the close relationship between rebellion and social sin, he does not think of social sin in terms of the deification of a race or a nation. He thinks of social sin as being largely due to man's lower nature and his bad environment. For Rauschenbusch the religious dimension of sin is a reality primarily because of the immanence of God in man. For Niebuhr the basis of all sin is religious because the root of sin is found in man's unbelief and defiance of God, which in turn leads him to depend on the highest in man. This dependence on man is the corruption which is the result of man's rebellion. Thus the development of man beyond sin is impossible and social sin is basically an enlargement of individual sin.

For those who feel that they are not among the proud who lust for power over other men, Niebuhr states:

> Sometimes man seeks to solve the problem of the contradiction of finiteness and freedom, not by seeking to hide his finiteness and comprehending the world into himself, but by seeking to hide his freedom by losing himself in some aspect of the world vitalities. In that case his sin may be defined as sensuality rather than pride. Sensuality is never the mere expression of natural impulse in man. It always betrays some aspect of his abortive effort to solve the problem of finiteness and freedom. Human passions are always characterized by unlimited and demonic potencies of which animal life is innocent.[1]

Since Niebuhr speaks of sin as being pride, will-to-power or sensuality, the question arises as to how he would classify the sin of sloth which is so important in Rauschenbusch's thought on sin. Apparently it would have to be classified as a form of sensuality. Sensuality, however, is usually not thought of as a term which is descriptive of a person who is slothful. Perhaps the sins of inertia and drifting are understood more realistically by Rauschenbush than by Niebuhr.

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 179.

a. Temptation and Sin

According to Niebuhr, man is in a situation which tempts to evil. This situation is one of finiteness and freedom. No temptation comes to man which does not presuppose a previous "tempter." The serpent is the symbol of this "tempter." Niebuhr writes:

> Thus, before man fell into sin there was, according to Biblical myth, a fall of the devil in heaven. The devil is a fallen angel who refused to accept his rightful place in the scheme of things and sought a position equal to God.[1]

Niebuhr affirms that "to believe that there is a devil is to believe that there is a principle or force of evil antecedent to any evil human action."[2]

Niebuhr is convinced that the real mystery of evil is that it presupposes itself. He says:

> No matter how far back it is traced in the individual or the race, a profound scrutiny of the nature of evil reveals that there is an element of sin in the temptation which leads to sin; and that, without this presupposed evil, the consequent sin would not necessarily arise from the situation in which man finds himself. This is what Kierkegaard means by saying that "sin posits itself."[3] There is no situation in which it is possible to say that sin is either an inevitable consequence of the situation nor yet that it is an act of sheer and perverse individual defiance of God.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for Today and Tomorrow (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 166.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 180.

[3] Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times, p. 166.

> But what is the situation which is the occasion of temptation? Is it not the fact that man is a finite spirit, lacking identity with the whole, but yet a spirit capable in some sense of envisaging the whole, so that he easily commits the error of imagining himself the whole which he envisages?[1]

The occasion for man's temptation is found in the two facts, "his greatness and his weakness, his unlimited and his limited knowledge, taken together."[2] Niebuhr recognizes that "man is both strong and weak, both free and bound, both blind and far-seeing."[3] Man is thus seen as standing at the juncture of nature and spirit. He is involved in both freedom and necessity. His sin should never be defined as the mere ignorance of his ignorance. Rather it should always be seen as "partly an effort to obscure his blindness by overestimating the degree of his sight and to obscure his insecurity by stretching his power beyond its limits."[4]

In brief, man is anxious. Anxiety is viewed by Niebuhr as "the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved."[5] He sees anxiety as "the internal precondition of sin."[6] Niebuhr states:

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 181.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 182. [6] Ibid.

> It must not be identified with sin because there is always the ideal possibility that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion. The ideal possibility is that faith in the ultimate security of God's love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history. This is why Christian orthodoxy has consistently defined unbelief as the root of sin, or as the sin which precedes pride.[1]

In conclusion Niebuhr points out that when anxiety has conceived it gives birth to both pride and sensuality. On this point, he writes:

> Man falls into pride, when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing himself into a "mutable good," by losing himself in some natural vitality.[2]

The importance of Niebuhr's understanding of temptation for his social ethics is found in the fact that he interprets temptation in terms of the inner condition of man who is involved in the paradox of freedom and finiteness. This means that temptation cannot be prevented by simply correcting the environment in which a man lives. Niebuhr favors the correcting of a bad environment, but at the same time he recognizes that man will still be tempted no matter how ideal his environment. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, tends to place the source of temptation in the outward circumstances rather than in the heart of man. This leads him toward the conclusion that by correcting the outward source of temptation the temptation itself will be avoided.

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 182-183. [2] _Ibid._, p. 186.

b. The Sin of Pride

In this section the emphasis will be on Niebuhr's relating of the "Biblical and distinctively Christian conception of sin as pride and self-love to the observable behaviour of man."[1] He distinguishes between three types of pride which he feels are never completely distinct in actual life: "pride of power, pride of knowledge and pride of virtue."[2] The third type, the pride of self-righteousness, is seen as rising "to a form of spiritual pride, which is at once a fourth type and yet not a specific form of pride at all but pride and self-glorification in its inclusive and quintessential form."[3]

(1) The pride of power is that form of pride in which a man's ego assumes its self-sufficiency and self-mastery and thinks itself secure against all changes of fortune. It refuses to note "the contingent and dependent character of its life and believes itself to be the author of its own existence, the judge of its own values and the master of its own destiny."[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

Niebuhr finds this proud pretension to be present in its beginning form in all human life. It rises, however, to its greatest heights among those individuals and classes who possess the most social power. In close relation to the pride which appears to rest upon the possession of an average or more than average measure of human freedom and self-mastery, is the lust for power which has pride as its result. The self senses its insecurity and therefore seeks for more power in order to establish its security. Neibuhr writes:

> In the one case the ego seems unconscious of the finite and determinate character of its existence. In the other case the lust for power is prompted by a darkly conscious realization of its insecurity. The first form of the pride of power is particularly characteristic of individuals and groups whose position in society is, or seems to be, secure. . . .
>
> The second form of the pride of power is more obviously prompted by the sense of insecurity. It is the sin of those, who knowing themselves to be insecure, seek sufficient power to guarantee their security, inevitably of course at the expense of other life. It is particularly the sin of the advancing forces of human society in distinction to the established forces.[1]

Niebuhr's analysis of the sin of pride presents a good illustration of his method of relating Christian revelation to the observable behaviour of men. It also indicates how Niebuhr's understanding of human nature sheds light on the intricate social problems with which he is concerned. An understanding of how the pride of power affects the acts of the individual man enables Niebuhr not only to develop a social ethics for dealing with the individual in society, but also with groups and even nations which tend to exhibit the same pride of power as the individual man. Niebuhr recognizes, however, that the pride of power which the group exhibits is usually far more vicious than that exhibited by the individual person. This insight of Niebuhr into the way in which the pride of power works in both the individual and the group is one of his greatest contributions to the field of social ethics, and is also a point on which he has advanced beyond Rauschenbusch.

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 188-190.

(2) The intellectual pride of man is seen by Neibuhr as being "a more spiritual sublimation of man's pride of power."[1] At times it becomes so deeply involved in the more cruel and obvious pride of power that the two are indistinguishable. All of man's knowledge is corrupted with an "ideological" taint. It imagines itself to be more than it is. In reality it is limited knowledge, arrived at from a particular point of view;

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[1] Ibid., p. 194.

but it imagines itself to be final and ultimate knowledge. According to Niebuhr, the pride of intellect proceeds "on the one hand from ignorance of the finiteness of the human mind and on the other hand from an attempt to obscure the known conditioned character of human knowledge and the taint of self-interest in human truth."[1]

Niebuhr's understanding of the sin of intellectual pride enables him to see through the false pretensions of all claims to finality whether in the realm of politics, economics, or race. This fact is illustrated inthe realm of politics where he points out that "the Marxist pride may, as in other instances of similar pride, be regarded as merely the fruit of the ignorance of ignorance."[2] Niebuhr delights in pointing out that as clever as the Marxists are in seeing through the ideological taint of others, they are unable or at least refuse to see the ideological taint in their own thinking. Again it is thus possible to see the application of a theological truth by Niebuhr to an issue in the realm of social ethics.

(3) Niebuhr finds that "all the elements of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 194-195.

[2] Ibid., p. 199.

moral pride are involved in . . . intellectual pride."[1] Moral pride is seen in all "self-righteous" judgments in which another is condemned because he does not adhere to the arbitrary standards of the self. When judging by its own standards, the self finds itself to be good. It then judges others by its own standards and finds them to be evil because their standards do not conform to its own. In this is found the secret of the relationship between cruelty and self-righteousness. If the self thinks its standards are God's standards, it then is inclined to attribute the very essence of evil to those with whom it disagrees. Niebuhr defines moral pride as follows:

> Moral pride is the pretension of finite man that his highly conditioned virtue is the final righteousness and that his very relative moral standards are absolute. Moral pride thus makes virtue the very vehicle of sin, a fact which explains why the New Testament is so critical of the righteous in comparison with "publicans and sinners."[2]

Frequently as Niebuhr analyses a particular aspect of the Christian doctrine of man, he will point out its relevance for social ethics. He sees the sin of self-righteousness as being "responsible for our most serious cruelties, injustices and defamations against our fellowmen."[3] In fact, Niebuhr finds that "the whole history of racial, national, religious and other social struggles is a commentary on the objective wickedness and social miseries which result from self-righteousness."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

(4) According to Niebuhr, the sin of moral pride, when it has conceived, gives birth to spiritual pride. The ultimate sin is seen by Niebuhr as "the religious sin of making the self-deification implied in moral pride explicit."[2] This happens when one's limited standards and relative accomplishments are openly related to the final good, and claim divine approval. Because of this fact, religion is not just "an inherently virtuous human quest for God."[3] In reality it is "a final battleground between God and man's self-esteem."[4] In that battle some of the most sacred acts may be weapons of human pride. Niebuhr points out that the same man may at one time "regard Christ as his judge and in the next moment seek to prove that the figure, the standards and the righteousness of Christ bear a greater similarity to his own righteousness than to that of his enemy."[5]

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[1] *Ibid.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

Through his analysis of spiritual pride, Niebuhr is able to see more clearly some of the worst forms of class domination and of intolerance. He sees in the Indian caste system an example of religious class domination in which "a dominant priestly class not only subjects subordinate classes to social disabilities but finally excludes them from participation in any universe of meaning."[1] In regard to intolerance, Niebuhr believes that the worst form of it "is religious intolerance, in which the particular interests of the contestants hide behind religious absolutes."[2]

c. The Relation of Dishonesty to Pride

In his analysis of man's sin of pride and self-love, Niebuhr consistently assumes that an element of deceit is involved in man's self-glorification. He regards this dishonesty as "a concomitant, and not as the basis, of self-love."[3] Man has an unrestrained love for himself. Since man does not deserve the affection he bestows upon himself, he deceives himself in order to justify such boundless affection. Then the self deceives others, at least partly in order to convince itself against itself. The sinner is always involved in the self-deception that the sin is a good. This is not just ignorance or perversity. Actually, this fact that man tries to justify himself reveals that man is not totally depraved. Niebuhr writes:

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

> The fact that this necessity exists is an important indication of the vestige of truth which abides with the self in all its confusion and which it must placate before it can act. The dishonesty of man is thus an interesting refutation of the doctrine of man's total depravity.[1]

Niebuhr's insight into the self-deception of man not only enables him to understand more fully the unethical acts of individual men, but also the unethical acts of society as well. Groups within society are often guilty of deceiving themselves as well as others. It is such insights as this that have aided Niebuhr in the development of his realistic social ethics.

d. Collective Egotism

Niebuhr believes that it is necessary to make a distinction between group pride and the egotism of individuals "because the pretensions and claims of a collective or social self exceed those of the individual ego."[2] He affirms that "the group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual."[3] This creates

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[1] Ibid., pp. 203-204.

[2] Ibid., p. 208.

[3] Ibid.

"an inevitable moral tension between individual and group morality."[1]

According to Niebuhr, collective pride is "man's last, and in some respects most pathetic, effort to deny the determinate character of his existence."[2] It contains the very essence of human sin. Human sin in this form is most fruitful of human guilt, especially of objective social and historical evil. Niebuhr concludes that "in its whole range from pride of family to pride of nation, collective egotism and group pride are a more pregnant source of injustice and conflict than purely individual pride."[3]

Niebuhr's concept of collective egotism is of the utmost significance for his social ethics, and vividly illustrates how he has corrected the social ethics of Rauschenbusch. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch failed fully to understand both the distinction and the unity that exists between the individual and the group. The distinction is seen in the fact that group pride is always "a more pregnant source of injustice and conflict than purely individual pride."[4] Because of this distinction, Niebuhr recognizes, in contrast to Rauschenbusch, that groups cannot be "converted" and "changed" like individual persons. You cannot expect the same standard of morality from a nation as you can expect from an individual within the nation. Niebuhr, on the other hand, also sees the unity that exists between the individual and the group. He sees this unity in the fact that group sin ultimately stems from the religious sin of man (idolatry). Neibuhr affirms that "group pride is . . . an aspect of the pride and arrogance of individuals."[1] In fact, "it is the fruit of the undue claims which they make for their various social groups."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp 208-209. [2] Ibid., p. 213.

[3] Ibid. [4] Ibid.

e. "The Equality of Sin and the Inequality of Guilt"[3]

Niebuhr points out that throughout the history of Christianity orthodoxy has generally held to the

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[1] Ibid., p. 208

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 219. Although Niebuhr prefers no longer to use this phrase, he still maintains the truth which it was designed to convey. He points out that William John Wolf "is right in critizing my idea of 'equality of sin and inequality of guilt' as elaborated in The Nature and Destiny of Man. I have been convinced for some time that this was an error. I sought to do justice to the fact that there is in fact great distinction between forms of evil, that the saint and the criminal are not all alike but that yet in the ultimate instance it is true that 'in God's sight no man living is justified.' It is not, however, adequate to explain this situation in quantitative terms. I remain baffled in my search for an adequate description of the situation which will allow for discriminate judgments between good and evil on the one hand, and which will, on the other, preserve the Biblical affirmation that all men fall short before God's judgment." (Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 437.)

Biblical truth that all men are equally sinners in the sight of God. He believes that Paul's statement, "for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22,23), is an essential expression of the Christian conception of sin. At the same time it appears to Niebuhr that this statement endangers and weakens "all moral judgments which deal with the 'nicely calculated less and more' of justice and goodness revealed in the relativities of history."[1] Niebuhr writes:

> It seems to inhibit preferences between the oppressor and his victim, between the congenital liar and the moderately truthful man, between the debauched sensualist and the self-disciplined worker, and between the egotist who drives egocentricity to the point of sickness and the moderately "unselfish" devotee of the general welfare. Though it is quite necessary and proper that these distinctions should disappear at the ultimate religious level of judgment, yet it is obviously important to draw them provisionally in all historic judgments. . . . Theologies, such as that of Barth, which threaten to destroy all relative moral judgments by their exclusive emphasis upon the ultimate religious fact of the sinfulness of all men, are rightly suspected of imperilling relative moral achievements of history.[2]

Niebuhr warns Christians that they must be careful in relating the Biblical truth of the sinfulness of all men to the other truth that there is an inequality of guilt among men in the realities of history. He distinguishes guilt from sin by stating that guilt "represents the objective and historical consequences of sin, for which the sinner must be held responsible."[1] Guilt is seen as "the objective consequence of sin, the actual corruption of the plan of creation and providence in the historical world."[2]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol, I, pp. 219-220.

[2] Ibid., p. 220. Niebuhr is in agreement with Rauschenbusch on there being differences between sinners. The fact, however, that all men are similarly involved in sin is the religious dimension of sin which Rauschenbusch did not comprehend.

Niebuhr recognizes the fact that "men who are equally sinful in the sight of God may also be equally guilty in a specific situation."[3] He observes that the equality of their sin should lead to the general assumption that their guilt is more nearly equal than it may appear upon a superficial analysis. For example, a forsaken wife may be equally guilty with her faithless husband, though the actual act of abandonment was his alone. Niebuhr concludes:

> The Christian doctrine of the sinfulness of all men is thus a constant challenge to re-examine superficial moral judgments, particularly those which self-righteously give the moral advantage to the one who makes the judgment. . . .
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> Yet men who are equally sinners in the sight of God need not be equally guilty of a specific act of wrongdoing in which they are involved. It is important to recognize that Biblical religion has emphasized this inequality of guilt just as much as the equality of sin.[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

The point of greatest significance for Niebuhr's social ethics in his analysis of the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt is the fact that the man with power, wealth, and position will be more guilty even if not more sinful than his poverty stricken neighbor. In the Scriptures the prophets frequently pronounce their severest judgments upon the rich and powerful. In this regard, Niebuhr calls attention to the fact that the simple religious insight which is presupposed by these prophetic judgments is that "the men who are tempted by their eminence and by the possession of undue power become more guilty of pride and of injustice than those who lack power and position."[1] Niebuhr's method of analyzing experience in the light of Christian revelation is well illustrated by the following quotation:

> This Biblical analysis agrees with the known facts of history. Capitalists are not greater sinners than poor labourers by any natural depravity. But it is a fact that those who hold great economic and political power are more guilty of pride against God and of injustice against the weak than those who lack power and prestige. Gentiles are not naturally more sinful than Jews. But Gentiles, holding the dominant power in their several nations, sin against Semitic minority groups more than the latter sin against them. White men sin against Negroes in Africa and America more than Negroes sin against white men. Wherever the fortunes of nature, the accidents of history or even the virtues of the possessors of power, endow an individual or a group with power, social prestige, intellectual eminence or moral approval above their

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[1] Ibid., pp. 222-223.

> fellows, there an ego is allowed to expand. It expands both vertically and horizontally. Its vertical expansion, its pride, involves it in sin against God. Its horizontal expansion involves it in an unjust effort to gain security and prestige at the expense of its fellows. The two forms of expansion cannot be sharply distinguished because, as previously noted, spiritual pretension can be made an instrument of power in social conflict, and dominant power, measured socially, inevitably seeks to complete its structure by spiritual pretensions.[1]

Niebuhr goes on to point out that a too simple social radicalism fails to recognize how soon the poor and neglected of the past, may, on winning a social victory over their enemies, "exhibit the same arrogance and the same will-to-power which they abhorred in their opponents and which they were inclined to regard as a congenital sin of their enemies."[2] Niebuhr affirms that "every victim of injustice makes the mistake of supposing that the sin from which he suffers is a peculiar vice of his oppressor."[3] This is an example of the self-righteousness of the weak as distinguished from the self-righteousness of the powerful. Niebuhr sees this illustrated in the case of the new Russian oligarchy, "which believes that the very sins of power which it exemplifies by its arrogance are the peculiar vices of capitalism."[4] Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch are in agreement on the point that "in a given historical situation the powerful man or class is actually more guilty of injustice and pride than those who lack power."[1] In contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch affirms that sin becomes guilt in proportion to the degree in which intelligence and will enter into men's acts. The implication of Rauschenbusch's position is that man is not guilty for his unconscious acts of sin. Niebuhr, however, holds that man is also guilty for his involuntary acts of sin. This point is illustrated by the example of the man who defends white supremacy in good faith. No matter how sincere he may be and how unconscious of his sin, from the point of view of Niebuhr, such a man is guilty of the oppression of his fellowman which is the objective consequence of his sin. He is also guilty of dishonesty in that he is involved in the self-deception of claiming that the sin is a good.

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 225-226.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 226.

[3] _Ibid_.

[4] _Ibid_.

C. Original Sin and Man's Responsibility

There are two points that must be considered in the Biblical doctrine of sin. One point is the fact that sin is inevitable. The other is that man is held responsible for his sins. Christian thought has never succeeded in putting these two ideas together in a perfectly logical synthesis. Yet both points, although they appear contradictory, are a part of Biblical religion and experience.

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[1] Ibid.

Early Protestant thought maintained the inevitability of sin to the neglect of responsibility. Niebuhr is determined to maintain the soundness of both ideas.[1]

According to him, original sin is by definition an inevitable corruption. Nevertheless, it is not to be thought of as belonging to man's essential nature, and therefore is not beyond the realm of his responsibility. Niebuhr affirms that "sin is natural for man in the sense that it is universal but not in the sense that it is necessary."[2] He regards sin as "neither a necessity of man's nature nor yet as a pure caprice of his will."[3] It comes rather from "a defect of the will for which reason it is not completely deliberate; but since it is the will in which the defect is found and the will presupposes freedom the defect cannot be attributed to a taint in man's nature."[4]

Niebuhr finds that "the whole crux of the doctrine of original sin lies in the seeming absurdity of the conception of free-will which underlies it."[5] On the one hand, the Pauline doctrine, as set forth by Augustine and the Reformers, holds that the will of man is enslaved to sin and is unable to fulfill God's law. Yet, on the other hand, the same Augustine stresses the reality of free-will whenever he has reason to fear that the doctrine of original sin might endanger the concept of human responsibility.[1]

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[1] John Haddon Leith, "A Comparative Study of the Anthropologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Emil Brunner" (unpublished M.A. thesis, School of Religion, Vanderbilt University, 1946), p. 64.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 242.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 243.

Niebuhr points out that the difference between original sin and actual sin is not as clear as is assumed in moralistic discussions on sin. He affirms that "the actual sin follows more inevitably from the bias toward sin than is usually assumed."[2] The bias toward sin is, however, something more than a mere cultural lag. "There is, in other words, less freedom in the actual sin and more responsibility for the bias toward sin (original sin) than moralistic interpretations can understand."[3] Niebuhr writes:

> The actual sin is the consequence of the temptation of anxiety in which all life stands. But anxiety alone is neither actual nor original sin. Sin does not flow necessarily from it. Consequently the bias toward sin from which actual sin flows is anxiety plus sin. Or, in the words of Kierkegaard, sin presupposes itself. Man could not be tempted if he had not already sinned.[4]

Niebuhr is convinced that the Christian concept of original sin with its apparently "contradictory assertions about the inevitability of sin and man's responsibility for sin is a dialectical truth."[1] This truth "does justice to the fact that man's self-love and self-centredness is inevitable, but not in such a way as to fit into the category of natural necessity."[2] Man sins within and by his freedom. According to Niebuhr, "the discovery of the inevitability of sin is man's highest assertion of freedom."[3] Niebuhr states:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 250.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., pp. 250-251.

> The fact that the discovery of sin invariably leads to the Pharisaic illusion that such a discovery guarantees sinlessness in subsequent actions is a revelation of the way in which freedom becomes an accomplice of sin. It is at this point that the final battle between humility and human self-esteem is fought.[4]

As is indicated in the above discussion on original sin and man's responsibility, Niebuhr endeavors to maintain the tension between the inevitability of sin and man's responsibility for it. He holds that sin is inevitable, but not necessary. Rauschenbusch recognizes the inevitability of sin under certain circumstances. For example, men who have been reared in a bad environment tend inevitably to become involved in the same type of sin that they have witnessed. Rauschenbusch almost seems to say that such men are not personally responsible, or at least not as responsible as Niebuhr would have them. If a bad environment is corrected, then Rauschenbusch believes that no longer would sin be inevitable, but that there would be a real possibility for victory over sin. Thus, on the one hand, he emphasizes the inevitability of sin to the neglect of man's responsibility, while on the other hand, he emphasizes man's responsibility to the neglect of sin's inevitability.

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[1] Ibid., p. 263.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

The whole question of justification and sanctification will be discussed in the following chapter, but at present it is important to point out that Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch on this issue in that Niebuhr holds that every act of man is tinged by sin. He points out that the "awareness of guilt arises with spiritual sensitivity."[1] From Niebuhr's point of view, "the saint's awareness of guilt is no illusion."[2]

Another point of disagreement between the two men on the subject of original sin and man's responsibility is indicated by their explanation of evil in human actions. In addition to explaining man's bias toward evil in terms of his lower nature which he has inherited from his relation to the brute creation, Rauschenbusch lays his primary stress on the transmission of sin through social institutions. He does this because he believes that something can be done to lessen the transmission of sin along social channels, whereas the biological transmission of original sin is largely beyond man's influence. Thus Rauschenbusch is led to develop a social ethics which concentrates on the reform of social institutions in the hopes of thereby lessening the transmission of sin. Niebuhr also rejects the idea of the "biological transmission of original sin" while at the same time he recognizes the social transmission of sin and the need for reforming social institutions. He does not believe, however, that such reform will weaken the real essence of sin. Niebuhr's reply to Rauschenbusch's position is that "purely sociological and historical explanations of the rise of evil do not touch the depth of the mystery at all."[1] He writes:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 258. [2] *Ibid.*

> By thus placing the inherited sloth in history rather than in each man's own sensual nature, some justice is done to the actual historical continuum in which every human action takes place, but the bias toward evil is always outside and never inside a particular will. The theory is thus virtually identical with the modern secular idea of the "cultural lag" as the explanation of evil in human actions.[2]

D. Original Righteousness

The universal experience of mankind testifies to the fact that men have an uneasy conscience about the difference between what they are and what they feel they ought to be. All men appear to have some knowledge of the good, unless they are mentally irresponsible. The revelation of God in Christ brings into clearer focus the distinction between what man is and what he ought to be. Jesus is the example of true humanity.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times, pp. 166-167.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 246.

The Stoics attributed man's hazy knowledge of what he ought to be to his memory of a golden age of innocency at the beginning of the world. Classical Christianity attributed it to man's state in Paradise before the Fall. Niebuhr rejects the literal interpretation of the paradisical myth. He then makes a different approach to the problem of the relationship between what man is and what he ought to be.[2]

The clue to Niebuhr's thought upon the subject is found in the following words:

> The perfection before the Fall is always an ideal possibility before the act. It describes a dimension of human existence rather than a period of history. It is the vision of health which even a sick man has. It is the structure of the good without which there could be no evil. The anarchy of Europe is evil only because it operates against an ideal possibility and necessity of order in Europe. The blindness of the eye is evil only because the ideal possibility is sight.[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 265-266. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 268.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Natural Law," *Theology*, XL (February, 1940), p. 90.

> The relation of man's essential nature to his sinful state cannot be solved within terms of the chronological version of the perfection before the Fall. It is, as it were, a vertical rather than horizontal relation. When the Fall is made an event in history rather than a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man, the relation of evil to goodness in that moment is obscured.[1]

If there is no historical period to which may be assigned the original righteousness, can a locus be found for it? Niebuhr answers this question by using the example of a sound and a diseased body. When a man's body is diseased, no special organ can be referred to as the locus of health. The same is true with the man who is sick with sin for "it is not possible to exempt 'reason' or any other human faculty from the disease of sin."[2] It is possible, however, "to find a locus for the consciousness and memory of an original perfection."[3] This fact is in close relation to man's capacity for transcendence. Niebuhr writes:

> It is in this moment of self-transcendence that the consciousness and memory of original perfection arise. For in this moment the self knows itself as merely a finite creature among many others and realizes that the undue claims which the anxious self in action makes, result in injustices to its fellows.[4]

The specific content of this original righteousness, which is more than law in that it transcends all law, remains with sinful man, not as a possession, but rather in the sense of something lacking. Niebuhr summarizes the content of original righteousness in following three terms:

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 269.

[2] Ibid., pp. 276-277.

[3] Ibid., p. 277.

[4] Ibid.

> (a) The perfect relation of the soul to God in which obedience is transcended by love, trust and confidence ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"); (b) the perfect internal harmony of the soul with itself in all of its desires and impulses: "With all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind"; and (c) the perfect harmony of life with life: "Thou shalt love they neighbor as thyself."[1]

Niebuhr's understanding of original righteousness is of the utmost importance for his social ethics. In his chapter on original righteousness in the first volume of The Nature and Destiny of Man, he devotes an entire section to the content of original righteousness as law, and another section to the transcendent character of original righteousness. Since both of these sections are so central to his social ethics, they will be discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation which deals primarily with social ethics. Suffice it to state that for Niebuhr original righteousness is not a simple possibility for man. This interpretation of original righteousness leads to one of the major differences between Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr, in contrast to Rauschenbusch, does not accept the ethics of Jesus as presented in the Sermon on the Mount as a simple possibility for men. Niebuhr's position is well summarized in the following quotation:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 288-289. There is a helpful discussion on Niebuhr's view of original righteousness in the thesis written by Leith, "A Comparative Study of the Anthropologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Emil Brunner," pp. 49-52.

> Against pessimistic theories of human nature which affirm the total depravity of man it is important to assert the continued presence in man of the *justitia originalis*, of the law of love, as law and requirement. It is equally important, in refutation of modern secular and Christian forms of utopianism, to recognize that the fulfillment of the law of love is no simple possibility.[1]

III. SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this section is to summarize the most important facts which have been presented about Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understandings of man, including their basic presuppositions, as these facts affect their social ethics. These facts will be set forth according to whether they are points of agreement or disagreement between the two men. They agree on the major premise that both man and society stand in need of salvation. They only partially agree on what man's condition in society actually is.

A. Agreements

For both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr the teachings of

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[1] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, p. 296.

Jesus and the prophets are important. The Christian ethics as presented by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is relevant for contemporary man and should be considered in the development of a Christian social ethics. The demand of the prophets for social righteousness is still applicable to society. Both men accept Biblical criticism and have abandoned the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. They agree that the Bible is not a scientific text book and therefore that it should not be pitted against the findings of modern science. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each stand in opposition to both fundamentalism and to the extreme liberalism of Unitarianism. They each believe in the importance of criticizing the Christian tradition from within the faith while maintaining the basic truths of the Gospel.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr affirm the liberal spirit which is exemplified by an open mind and the willingness to respect the opinions of others. They are each willing to accept truth from whatever source it might come. This means that neither man hesitates to make use of both the physical and social sciences if he feels that they can be of value to either his theology or his social ethics. Thus both men have a respect for science and the scientific method. In regard to questions involving factual knowledge, they would rely on modern means of ascertaining factual truth rather than on faith.

Both men recognize the value of personal religious experience in the formulation of theology and social ethics. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each acknowledge the power for both good and evil in such super-personal forces as churches, political parties, and social organizations. Each man is aware of the danger of the reappearance of evil on a new level even if it has been partially corrected on one level.[1] They affirm the social transmission and perpetuation of sin while opposing the concept of the biological transmission of sin. Sin itself is personal and therefore cannot be inherited. A man may inherit a certain physical weakness which may make it difficult for him to overcome a particular bad habit, but this is not the inheritance of sin. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr are indebted to Schleiermacher for his solidaristic conception of sin. Both men agree on the point that "in a given historical situation the powerful man or class is actually more guilty of injustice and pride than those who lack power."[2]

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr are mutually opposed to legalism in religion. They do not believe that one's salvation depends upon the observance of certain legal requirements such as a strict observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. At the same time they are equally opposed to antinomianism. They recognize the value of the moral law and the obligation of the Christian to live to the best of his ability in harmony with God's moral requirements. There is agreement on opposing the pietistic approach to ethical issues. While they each acknowledge the importance of personal salvation, they go on to affirm that even "saved" men do not guarantee a "saved" society. Social issues are far more complicated than most pietists realize. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr stand in opposition to strict individualism which fails to see the unity between the individual and the group. The importance of the individual is affirmed, but so is the value of the group. They are both opposed to asceticism for they agree that the ascetic neglects his responsibility for others while being primarily concerned about his own personal salvation.

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[1] While Rauschenbusch is aware of the danger of the reappearance of evil on a new level, he is not as certain as Niebuhr that this will always be the case. For a discussion of Rauschenbusch's view of the power of evil, see pp. 92-98 of this chapter and his book The Social Principles of Jesus, pp. 151-166.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 226.

B. Disagreements

Although Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch as to the importance of the teachings of Jesus and the prophets, Niebuhr stresses other portions of Scripture as well, particularly the writings of Paul. Niebuhr finds them especially helpful in the development of his understanding of man.

He makes extensive use of symbol and myth in a way that is not found in Rauschenbusch's use of the Bible. In contrast to Rauschenbusch's reliance on modern thought as the source of basic theological ideas, Niebuhr is dependent on the Bible for his understanding of creation, history, man, and God. In general Rauschenbusch assumes the authenticity of the words of Jesus and the prophets as having been spoken by them. Niebuhr does not make this assumption, but recognizes that the words attributed to Jesus and the prophets are often theological interpretations which have been made by their followers.

Niebuhr finds great value in Christian tradition. This is seen in his reliance on the insights of such men as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin in the development of the Christian doctrine of man. Rauschenbusch tends to neglect much of Christian tradition, ruling out large portions of it as representing the Hellenization of Christianity.

Although Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch as to the value of personal religious experience, Niebuhr goes on to point out that such religious experience must be checked by the experience of the Christian community. Personal religious experience is defined by Niebuhr as "general" revelation which needs to be corrected by the "special" revelation which is recorded in the Scripture and testified to by the Christian community. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, tends to think of personal religious experience as being "special" revelation, so according to Niebuhr he stands in danger of losing the distinction between "special" and "general" revelation.

Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch in regard to the latter's understanding of the immanence of God. This disagreement involves the whole question of immanence versus transcendence and of continuity versus discontinuity. The limits of this thesis do not permit a thorough investigation of this problem which ultimately involves both Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understanding of God. Suffice it here to state that Rauschenbusch stresses immanence and continuity while Niebuhr stresses transcendence and discontinuity. It is the conviction of this writer that though Rauschenbusch stresses immanence and continuity, he does not completely neglect the transcendence of God, and therefore he is not a pantheist. This writer is also convinced that though Niebuhr stresses the transcendence and discontinuity of God, he does not completely neglect the actual redemptive working of God in history, including God's continuous sustaining of His creation, and therefore he is not a deist.

Rauschenbusch finds Darwin's theory of evolution of special value in explaining such doctrines as original sin and the Fall of man. Although Niebuhr also is influenced by Darwinian thinking, as is indicated by his rejection of the Fall as a dated event in history, it is not basic to his theological formulations. And whereas Rauschenbusch's social ethics reflects the nineteenth century's assumption of process and progressive development, that assumption is not affirmed by Niebuhr so as to include a progressive development of cultural change on the moral and religious level.

Another point of disagreement between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is on the question of justification and sanctification. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, but at present it should be pointed out that whereas Rauschenbusch expects victories over sin on the part of both individuals and society, Niebuhr believes that every act of both individuals and society within history will always be tinged with sin.

In contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch holds that man's moral delinquencies result from his sensual equipment, ignorace, and inertia. Niebuhr, on the other hand, points out that sin is possible for man because he is made in the image of God and is thus a free creature with the capacity for self-transcendence. Since man has the ability to transcend himself, he is able to raise some finite and contingent element of existence into the place of the divine. Thus man is often guilty of the sin of idolatry by making his race, class or nation into his god. The religious dimension of sin which is set forth so clearly by Niebuhr in terms of man's unbelief and rebellion against God is not understood by Rauschenbusch. The latter places his primary emphasis on what Niebuhr considers as the moral and social dimension of sin. This dimension of sin is not neglected by Niebuhr, but it is not as significant for him as his concept of the religious dimension of sin.

While agreeing with Rauschenbusch on the fact that the reform of social institutions may lessen the spread of some forms of sin, Niebuhr proceeds to affirm that such reforms will not weaken the heart of sin which is found in man's unbelief and rebellion against God. He takes this position because he believes that man's bias toward evil is primarily within his particular will rather than outside. Niebuhr writes:

> While all particular sins have both social sources and social consequences, the real essence of sin can be understood only in the vertical dimension of the soul's relation to God because the freedom of the self stands outside all relations, and therefore has no other judge but God. It is for this reason that a profound insight into the character of sin must lead to the confession, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51).[1]

Because Rauschenbusch does not fully comprehend the above concept of sin, but instead thinks of sin primarily in terms of selfishness which is seen in the violation of moral codes, he holds that such reforms will lessen even the heart of sin.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Another point on which Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch is in regard to what the latter calls the "super-personal" forces of society. While they each recognize the power of such forces for both good and evil, Niebuhr, in contrast to Rauschenbusch, points out that the super-personal forces of society cannot be treated as individuals; the super-personal forces cannot be converted and renewed in the way an individual person can.

There is disagreement between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr on the question of the relation between sin and guilt. With Rauschenbusch, as with Schleiermacher, sin is practically identical with a person's consciousness of it. The logical conclusion of this position is that a man is not guilty for his unconscious acts of sin. Niebuhr, on the other hand, insists that a man is also guilty for his involuntary acts of sin. Thus Niebuhr holds that the man who conscientiously, but dishonestly, defends white supremacy is nevertheless guilty of sin.

Such moralistic interpretations of sin as that of Rauschenbusch have led to Niebuhr's criticism that "there is . . . less freedom in the actual sin and more responsibility for the bias toward sin (original sin) than moralistic interpretations can understand."[1] As is indicated above, Rauschenbusch stresses man's responsibility for his conscious acts of sin, but not for his unconscious acts of sin or for original sin. Niebuhr's understanding of original sin and man's responsibility also illustrates an important methodological difference between the two men. Niebuhr endeavors to maintain the tension between the inevitability of sin and man's responsibility for it. He affirms that sin is inevitable, but not necessary. Thus is seen the dialectical or paradoxical nature of Niebuhr's thought. He is much more concerned with maintaining what he considers to be true to both experience and Christian revelation than in maintaining logical consistency in harmony with the laws of reason. The fact that Niebuhr is referred to as a dialectical theologian is indicative of the fact that on every major theological or ethical question he tries to preserve the tension between an analysis of the human situation and the insights of Christian revelation. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, is concerned with presenting in a logically consistent manner his understanding of both theological and ethical questions. Throughout the thesis this methodological difference will increasingly become more evident.

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[1] Ibid., p. 250.

In this chapter the doctrines of man and some of the basic presuppositions of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr have been presented. Their doctrines of man have been states in accordance with each man's own outline. Then the most important facts which have been learned about Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understandings of man, including some of their basic presuppositions, are summarized. In this chapter it has been pointed out that both men recognize the sinfulness of individual man and of society. Thus man and society each stand in need of salvation.

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SALVATION AS UNDERSTOOD BY WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr agree on the major premise that the Christian Gospel contains the salvation which both man and society need. There are points of both agreement and disagreement as to exactly what the salvation is which the Christian Gospel contains. In this chapter each man's understanding of personal and social salvation will be presented. Then their agreements and disagreements in regard to salvation will be summarized.

I. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SALVATION AS UNDERSTOOD BY WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

Rauschenbusch begins his discussion of salvation by pointing out that all that he has said about sin must be kept in mind when thinking about salvation. He affirms that in every theological system the ideas of sin and salvation are always closely connected. According to him, what is new in the Social Gospel is "the clearness and insistence with which it sets forth the necessity and the possibility of redeeming the historical life of humanity from the social wrongs which now pervade it."[1] These social wrongs tempt men to evil and act "as forces of resistence to the powers of redemption."[2] The chief interest of the Social Gospel is centered in "those manifestations of sin and redemption which lie beyond the individual soul."[3]

Rauschenbusch recognizes, however, that the salvation of the individual is an important part of salvation. Acknowledging this fact, he devotes an entire chapter in his major theological work, A Theology for the Social Gospel, to a discussion of the subject of personal salvation. He is convinced that the Christian's "understanding of personal salvation itself is deeply affected by the new solidaristic comprehension furnished by the social gospel."[4] Before discussing Rauschenbusch's understanding of both individual and social salvation, it is important first of all to summarize briefly what he considers to be the problem of salvation. His interpretation of this problem will determine his concept of salvation.

A. The Problem of Salvation

The problem of salvation according to Rauschenbusch is primarily how finite and ignorant man can be saved from the forces of evil which lead him into sin. As has been indicated in Chapter II, these forces of evil are not to be defined in terms of traditional demonology. In relation to individual man, they may be defined as his ignorance and his "lower nature," both of which he needs to overcome. In regards to society, these forces of evil are such superpersonal entities as the capitalistic economic system, political parties, and even churches which devote themselves to their own selfish goals rather than to the good of all men.

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 95.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Rauschenbusch affirms that man is only vaguely and occasionally conscious of God, of his own greater possibilities, and of the value of individual personality. Thus man stands in need of a savior who will impart to him the savior's consciousness of God, the truth about man's own greater possibilities, and the awareness of the value of individual personality. Man also needs to become conscious of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it. Rauschenbusch is convinced that man must be brought to have "faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion."[1] He feels that the Social Gospel should seek

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 5.

"to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience."[1] He calls for the "faith of the old prophets who believed in the salvation of nations."[2] Rauschenbusch believes that society needs a savior who will "set in motion historical forces of redemption which will overthrow the forces of evil."[3]

As will be substantiated later on in this chapter, Rauschenbusch's understanding of the problem of salvation is contrary to that of Niebuhr. The latter is primarily concerned with the question of "how sinful man is to be reconciled to God and how history is to overcome the tragic consequences of its 'false eternals,' its proud and premature efforts to escape finiteness."[4] The difference between the two men on the problem of salvation is reflected in their concepts of such important doctrines as those of Christology, the atonement, the Kingdom of God, personal and social salvation, and eschatology. Rauschenbusch's understanding of these doctrines will now be discussed under the following three headings: the First Coming and salvation, the interim and salvation, and the Second Coming and salvation.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[3] Ibid., p. 147.

[4] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 147.

B. The First Coming and Salvation

Rauschenbusch finds the answer to the problem of salvation in the Christ who initiated the Kingdom of God. He admits that his "dominant interest in the creation and progress of social redemption influences the approach to the theological problems of the person and work of Christ."[1] Rauschenbusch writes:

> Theologians have always tried to make their christology match with their conception of salvation. If they believed salvation to consist chiefly in the knowledge of God, they emphasized the personality and the doctrine of Christ as the complete revelation of God. If they made salvation to consist chiefly in the mystic impartation of divine life and immortality, their christology laid chief stress on the union of the divine and human in the incarnation and in the sacraments. If salvation consists above all in the expiation of guilt, the forgiveness of sins, the justification of the sinner, and the remission of his penalties, then we need a Christ who made atonement for our sins, rendered satisfaction to God for our delinquencies, and offset our guilty defects by his infinite merit and divine virtue. Each conception of salvation made a pragmatic selection and construction of the facts. Each was fragmentary, but without necessarily excluding other series of ideas. So now the social gospel, without excluding other theological convictions, demands to understand the Christ who set in motion the historical forces of redemption which are to overthrow the Kingdom of Evil.[2]

Rauschenbusch is not particularly concerned with the metaphysical problems involved in the trinitarian and christological doctrines. He notes:

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 146.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

> The speculative problems of christological dogma was how the divine and human natures united in the one person of Christ; the problem of the social gospel is how the divine life of Christ can get control of human society. The social gospel is concerned about a progressive social incarnation of God.[1]

Rauschenbusch feels that orthodox theology does not give men a Christ who is truly personal. Instead, orthodoxy made Christ a "part of a scheme of salvation, the second premise in a great syllogism."[2] The Social Gospel wants to see a personal Christ who is "able to win hearts, dominate situations, able to bind men in loyalty and to make them think like himself, and to set revolutionary social forces in motion."[3]

Rauschenbusch points out that all the events of Christ's life, including his death, should be interpreted by "the dominant purpose which he consistently followed, the establishment of the Kingdom of God."[4] He affirms that this is the only interpretation which would have appealed to Jesus. "His life was what counted; his death was part of it."[5] The historic current of salvation which went out from Jesus "is the prolongation of that life into which he put his conscious energy."[6]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 147-148.

[2] Ibid., pp. 148-149.

[3] Ibid., p. 149.

[4] Ibid., p. 150.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch holds that theology is on the wrong trail when it seeks the key to Christ's life in the difficult doctrine of the two natures. He notes that the doctrine is still not settled, and that the formula of Chalcedon is a compromise. Rauschenbusch states:

> Any attempt to think precisely about the question results in a caricature; safety lies in vagueness. We shall come closer to the secret of Jesus if we think less of the physical process of conception and more of the spiritual processes of desire, choice, affirmation, and self-surrender within his own will and personality. The mysteries of the spiritual world take place within the will.
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> To repeat: The social gospel is not primarily interested in metaphysical questions; its christological interest is all for a real personality who could set a great historical process in motion; it wants his work interpreted by the purposes which ruled and directed his active work; it would have more interest in basing the divine quality of his personality on free and ethical acts of his will than in dwelling on the passive inheritance of a divine essence.[1]

Rauschenbusch believes that the first basic step in the salvation of humanity "was the achievement of the personality of Jesus."[2] This is true because "within him the Kingdom of God got its first foothold in humanity."[3] According to Rauschenbusch, "it was by virtue of his personality that he became the initiator of the Kingdom."[4] In regard to the personality of Jesus, Rauschenbusch writes:

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

> His personality was an achievement, not an effortless inheritance. His temptations and struggles were not stage-combats. At every point of his life he had to see his way through the tangle of moral questions which invited to errors and misjudgments; his clarity of judgment was an achievement. Not only in the desert but all the way he had to re-affirm his unity with the will of God and make all aims subservient to the Kingdom of God. . . .
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> . . . But unlike others, he did not fall into the sin of selfishness, because he succeeded in uniting the service of the common good with the affirmation of his selfhood.
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> The personality which he achieved was a new type of humanity. Having the power to master and assimilate others, it became the primal cell of a new social organism. Even if there had been no sin from which mankind had to be redeemed, the life of Jesus would have dated an epoch in the evolution of the race by the introduction of a new type and consequently new social standards. He is the real revelation of God. Other conceptions have to be outlived; his has to be attained.[1]

Rauschenbusch affirms the need for an overpowering consciousness of God "in order to offset and overcome the tyranny of the sensuous life and its temptations."[2] This consciousness of God which is derived from Jesus "is able to establish centres of spiritual strength and peace which help to break the free sweep of evil in social life."[3] According to Rauschenbusch, "Jesus set love into the centre of the spiritual universe, and all life is illuminated from that centre."[4] He concludes:

> So we have in Jesus a perfect religious personality, a spiritual life completely filled by the realization of a God who is love. All his mind was set on

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

> God and one with him. Consequently it was also absorbed in the fundamental purpose of God, the Kingdom of God. Like the idea of God, the conception of the Kingdom was both an inheritance and a creation of Jesus; he received it and transformed it in accordance with his consciousness of God. Within his mind the punitive and imperialistic elements were steeped out of it, and the elements of love and solidarity were dyed into it. The Reign of God came to mean the organized fellowship of humanity acting under the impulse of love.[1]

It is of interest to note that while Rauschenbusch is opposed to metaphysical questions such as the problem of the two natures of Christ, he nevertheless endeavors to explain what he considers to be the "divine quality of his [Christ's] personality."[2] This he does in terms of Christ's God consciousness and of the free and ethical acts of Christ's will. The logical implication of Rauschenbusch's Christology is that Jesus' personality is a matter of his own attainment, and that other men might also achieve such perfection by following in the steps of Jesus. This understanding of the person of Christ is reflected in

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[1] Ibid., pp. 154-155.

[2] Ibid., p. 151. Rauschenbusch does not believe in the deity of Christ. He does speak of "the divine life of Christ," of Christ as "the real revelation of God," of him as "a perfect religious personality," and even of Jesus as being "in a unique way, true of no other, . . . the only begotten and first born Son of God." When, however, these statements are examined in the light of their total context, it is seen that Rauschenbusch definitely does not mean to imply by them that Jesus is God or the Incarnation of God. The above statements are all found in Rauschenbusch's chapter on "The Initiator of the Kingdom of God" in his book, A Theology for the Social Gospel, pp. 146-166.

Rauschenbusch's social ethics in which he assumes that social institutions are capable of being redeemed by God to the degree that they will be to a large extent victorious over sin. In Rauschenbusch's Christology God's responsibility for the person of Christ, as is symbolized by the virgin birth, is played down while Jesus' part in the development of his personality is stressed.

As will be indicated in the discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of Christ, Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch in regard to the latter's opposition to metaphysical questions about the two natures of Jesus. At the same time, however, Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch's own effort to explain the person of Jesus. Niebuhr also disagrees with Rauschenbusch's social ethics in regard to the extent to which it is possible to redeem social institutions from sin. While at this point these issues between the two men are only being pointed out, later on in this chapter they will be discussed in greater detail. Before ending this section on the First Coming and salvation, it is important to note Rauschenbusch's interpretation of the atonement.

Rauschenbusch recognizes the importance of the doctrine of the atonement for Christian theology. At the same time he acknowledges the difficulties involved in explaining it. He summarizes these difficulties as follows:

> As Christian men we believe that the death of our Lord concerns us all. Our sins caused it. He bore the sin of the world. In turn his death was somehow for our

> good. Our spiritual situation is fundamentally changed in consequence of it. But how? How did he bear our sins? How did his death affect God? How did it affect us?[1]

Rauschenbusch believes that the solution to the mystery of the atonement is to be found in the recognition of solidarity.[2]

In answer to the question of how Jesus bore our sins, Rauschenbusch points out that in his human life Jesus was bound up with the life of humanity. He was influenced by the historical life of the Jewish people through the channels of social tradition. He then transmitted the effects of his own life and personality to others through the same channels. Strong, universal personalities tend consciously to absorb the general life and identify themselves with it. Jesus possessed an unusual sense of solidarity. He thus "had the capacity to generalize his personal experiences and make them significant of the common life."[3]

Rauschenbusch affirms that public evils have so pervaded the social life of humanity throughout history that no one can live among men without being affected by these collective sins. "He will either sin by consenting in them, or he will suffer by resisting them."[4]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 244.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 245.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 245-246.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 247.

Rauschenbusch states:

> Jesus did not in any real sense bear the sin of some ancient Briton who beat up his wife in B.C. 56, or of some mountaineer in Tennessee who got drunk in A.D. 1917. But he did in a very real sense bear the weight of the public sins of organized society, and they in turn are causally connected with all private sins.[1]

These public sins are: "religious bigotry, the combination of graft and political power, the corruption of justice, the mob spirit, militarism, and class contempt."[2] These are a summation of the constitutional forces in the Kingdom of Evil. Rauschenbusch thus affirms Jesus' relation to these sins:

> Jesus bore these sins in no legal or artificial sense, but in their impact on his own body and soul. He had not contributed to them, as we have, and yet they were laid on him. They were not only the sins of Caiaphas, Pilate, or Judas, but the social sin of all mankind, to which all who ever lived have contributed, and under which all who ever lived have suffered.[3]

Rauschenbusch believes that this solidaristic interpretation of Jesus' death is based on the authority of Jesus. In the parable of the Vineyard Jesus described the religious history of the Jewish nation as a constant struggle between God and His prophets on one side, and the exploiters of religion on the other. Christ's own death came "at the end of the prophetic succession as its culmination."[4] Jesus thus gives "an historical, social, and solidaristic interpretation of his death."[1] Rauschenbusch interprets Jesus' thought on the atonement as follows:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

[3] Ibid., p. 258.

[4] Ibid.

> His thought is that by repeating the sins of the past we are involved in the guilt of the past. We are linked in a solidarity of evil and guilt with all who have done the same before us, and all who will do the same after us. In so far then as we, by our conscious actions or our passive consent, have repeated the sins which killed Jesus, we have made ourselves guilty of his death. . . .
>
> This is Christ's own theology. It is not a legal theory of imputation, but a conception of spiritual solidarity, by which our own free and personal acts constitute us partakers of the guilt of others.[2]

In attempting to answer the question of how the death of Jesus affected God and changed the relation of humanity to Him, Rauschenbusch points out that one must "see the death of Christ as an integral part of his life."[3] Through his life and death Jesus achieved his own personality. "He did it for himself, as well as for God and humanity."[4] Jesus owed his life and death to God for even Jesus was under the law which he had proclaimed, "from him to whom much is given, much shall be required."[5] The spiritual redemptive value of Christ's death "was in the willingness with which he took on himself this highest and hardest part of his lifework."[6] The death of Christ "was the culmination of his life, its most luminous point, the most dramatic expression of his personality, the consistent assertion of the purpose and law which had ruled him and formed him."[1] Through his death, Jesus learned God's attitude toward sin. By entering into that attitude and making it his own, Jesus "revealed God at the point where the sin of the world and the mind of God were in sharpest antagonism."[2] God's attitude toward sin is composed of opposition and love. "God has always borne the brunt of human sin while loving us."[3] Within his own human limitations "Jesus acted as God acts."[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 259.

[3] Ibid., p. 260.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 261.

According to Rauschenbusch, "if we think of God in a human way, it seems as if the death of Jesus must have been a great experience for God."[5] He feels that "if Christ was the divine Logos--God himself expressing himself--then the experience of the cross reacted directly on the mind of God."[6] Rauschenbusch speculates that "if the principle of forgiving love had not been in the heart of God before, this experience would fix it there."[7] Rauschenbusch also is convinced that Jesus changed the relation between God and humanity. He points out that "as long as humanity lives within the Kingdom of Evil, it is out of spiritual unity and fellowship with God, and God is forced into an attitude of opposition where he desires to be in an attitude of love and help."[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 261-262.

[3] Ibid., p. 262.

[4] Ibid., p . 263.

[5] Ibid., p. 264.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch sees Jesus as being the first man "to live fully within the consciousness of God and to share his holy and loving will."[2] He affirms that by drawing others into his realization of God, Jesus led them to love God freely and to accept His will as their own. Thus Jesus set in motion a new beginning of spiritual life within humanity which later pervaded the common life. "This was the embryonic beginning of the Kingdom of God within the race."[3] For God "this initiation of a new humanity was the guarantee of its potential perfection."[4] Rauschenbusch believes that Jesus altered "the relation between God and humanity from antagonism to co-operative unity of will."[5] He writes:

> When men would learn to understand and love God; and when God could by anticipation see his own life appropriated by men, God and men would enter into spiritual solidarity, and this would be the only effective reconciliation.[6]

Rauschenbusch holds that Christ's death was essential to "his work of establishing solidarity and reconciliation between God and man."[1] Jesus' death was "his supreme act of opposition to sin."[2] At the same time it was his "supreme act . . . of obedience to God."[3] In addition, Jesus' ability "to assimilate others to his God-consciousness and to gather a new humanity, was influenced by his death, and the creation of such an effective nucleus is essential to any reconciliation."[4]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 264-265.

[2] Ibid., p. 265.

[3] Ibid., p. 265.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Finally, Rauschenbusch inquires how the atonement affected men. He asks: "What did the death of Christ add to his life in the way of reconciling, and redemptive power."[5] Rauschenbusch answers this question by pointing out that "Jesus influences human thought and feeling in many ways"[6] He mentions three.

First, the death of Christ is "the conclusive demonstration of the power of sin in humanity."[7] Rauschenbusch affirms that no event in history has caused men to realize the sin of humanity from so many points of view. He believes that no historical event has so impressed man with his own participation in sin and the solidarity of humanity in sin. In as much as a genuine consciousness of sin is the first step toward salvation from sin, the cross is an essential part of the plan of salvation. The life of Christ did not spread as much of a realization of sin as his death.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

Second, the death of Christ is "the supreme revelation of love."[2] Rauschenbusch states that Jesus' death underscores all he said on love. He noted that the human value of his love became translated into higher terms by the conviction that Christ revealed and set forth the heart and mind of God. "If Christ stood for saving pity and tender mercy and love that seeks the lost, then God must be that kind of God."[3] Man's conception of the love of God is re-enforced when he sees in the cross the great pronouncement of the redemptive love of God. Rauschenbusch points out that "as the outcome of the life and death of Jesus, a body of organized life and thought was set in motion through history which interpreted the universe from the point of view of love and saw all ethical questions and duties with love at the center."[4] The cross as the revelation of God's love tells men of God's grace and invites them to repentance and humility. Rauschenbusch concludes:

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 269-270. [2] _Ibid_., p. 270.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 271.

[4] Walter Rauschenbusch, _Dare We Be Christians?_ (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1914), p. 56.

> If love is the fundamental quality in God, it must be part of the consitution of humanity. Then it can not be impossible to found society on love. The atonement is the symbol and basis of a new social order.[1]

"Third, the death of Christ has reinforced prophetic religion."[2] Rauschenbusch believes that Jesus' death "comforted and supported all who bore prophetic suffering by the consciousness that they were 'bearing the marks of the Lord Jesus' and were carrying on what he had borne."[3] He affirms that it is the rightful comfort of the prophet to recall the sufferings of Jesus. Rauschenbusch concludes:

> Thus the cross of Christ contributed to strengthen the power of prophetic religion, and therewith the redemptive forces of the Kingdom of God. . . . The era of prophetic and democratic Christianity has just begun. This concerns the social gospel, for the social gospel is the voice of prophecy in modern life.[4]

In his discussion of the atonement, Rauschenbusch answers three questions: (1) How did Jesus bear the sins of man? (2) How did Jesus' death affect God? (3) How does Jesus' death on the cross affect man?

(1) How did Jesus bear the sins of man? Rauschenbusch

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, pp. 273-274.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

[4] *Ibid.*

believes that the answer to this question has been barred by man's stress on individualism. He points out that the solution to the mystery of how Jesus bore man's sins is to be found in the recognition of human solidarity. Social evils have so permeated the common life of man throughout history that it is impossible to live among men without feeling the influence of collective sins. He will either sin by approving them, or he will suffer by opposing them. Jesus bore the weight of such public sins as religious bigotry and mob rule which in turn are causally related to all private sins. In as much as any man either by his conscious actions or by his passive consent has repeated the sins which killed Jesus, he has made himself guilty of Jesus' death.

(2) How did Jesus' death affect God? In answer to this question, Rauschenbusch suggests that if God is thought of in a human way, then Christ's death may be considered as constituting a meaningful experience for God. If God did not already love man, such an experience would cause Him to do so. Having initiated the Kingdom of God among men by drawing others into his God-consciousness, Christ succeeded in altering the relation between God and man from one of conflict to one of unity of will. Man must come to understand and love God. When God visualizes His own life as claimed by man, then God and man will join in spiritual solidarity which is the only effective reconciliation.

(3) How does Jesus' death on the cross affect man? According to Rauschenbusch, the death of Christ affects man in three primary ways: it reveals to him the power of evil in humanity; it furnishes him with the supreme revelation of the love of God; and it re-inforces prophetic religion among men.

Before leaving the subject of the atonement, it is important in regard to this thesis to point out one of the major differences between Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understandings of the atonement. Both men agree that the atonement is a revelation of the love of God. They also agree that if love is a vital quality in the nature of God, it must also be a vital quality in the nature of man. From these points of agreement, however, the two men draw opposite conclusions. Rauschenbusch concludes that if love is a vital quality in the nature of man, then it must be possible to found society on love. Niebuhr, on the other hand, concludes that even if love is a vital quality in the nature of man it does not mean that it is possible to found society on love. Love is occasionally exhibited by society, but it is not possible for society to live by pure love. Society can, however, endeavor to establish at least an approximation of justice. This crucial difference between the two men on the subject of the applicability of Christ's ethics of love to society is substantiated throughout this thesis.

C. The Interim and Salvation

By the interim is meant that period of time between the First Coming of Christ and his Second Coming.[1] The interim is thus within history. Both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree that within history man may taste of salvation, but that he will not experience it in its fullness. This section of the thesis will be divided according to Rauschenbusch's own chapter headings which set forth the following four topics: (1) the Social Gospel and personal salvation, (2) the salvation of the super-personal forces, (3) the Church as the social factor of salvation, and (4) the Kingdom of God.

1. The Social Gospel and Personal Salvation

In Rauschenbusch's discussion of the Social Gospel and personal salvation he affirms that the Social Gospel presents new tests for religious experience. He writes that "it is time to overhaul our understanding of the kind of change we hope to produce by personal conversion and regeneration."[2] The terms and definitions of salvation receive "more realistic significance and ethical reach when we see the internal crises of the individual in connection with the social forces that play upon him or go out from him."[1] The social forces that play upon man are those of his historical, social, and religious environment. These forces determine the form the process of redemption takes in him. On the other hand, a religious experience of redemption which does not transform the forces going out from man into concern for his fellows is not a distinctively Christian experience.[2]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. II: Human Nature (one vol. ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 48-49. By the use of Niebuhr's terminology this writer does not feel that he is prejudicing the reader in favor of, or against, either Rauschenbusch or Niebuhr. It has been chosen as a convenient way of organizing the material of this chapter.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, pp. 96-97.

Rauschenbusch points out that "if sin is selfishness, salvation must be a change which turns a man from self to God and humanity."[3] Rauschenbusch understands a complete salvation as consisting in an attitude of love in which a man freely co-ordinates his life with the life of others in obedience to the loving inspiration of the spirit of God. The relationship between Rauschenbusch's understanding of personal salvation and his social ethics is seen in his belief that if men come under the influence of the mind of Christ they will "see men and women as children of God with divine worth and beauty."[4] Rauschenbusch is convinced that this realization will cool man's lust or covetousness. He predicts that if a person came to live in the awareness of the pervading spiritual life of God, "he would realize that all his gifts and resources are a loan of God for higher ends, and would do his work with greater simplicity of mind and brotherliness."[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 97.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 98.

Rauschenbusch acknowledges that "in actual life there is no case of complete Christian transformation."[2] He states:

> But in some germinal and rudimentary form salvation must turn us from a life centred on ourselves toward a life going out toward God and men. God is the all-embracing source and exponent of the common life and good of mankind. When we submit to God, we submit to the supremacy of the common good. Salvation is the voluntary socializing of the soul.[3]

Rauschenbusch notes that conversion has often been conceived as a break with one's sinful past. But in many instances it may also be a break with the sinful past of a particular social organization. The relation of personal conversion to social salvation as understood by Rauschenbusch is seen in the fact that conversion is most valuable when "it throws a revealing light not only across our own past, but across the social life of which we are part, and makes our repentance a vicarious sorrow for all."[4]

Rauschenbusch observes that the classical passage on regeneration (John 3) relates it to the Kingdom of God. Thus the scope of regeneration does not end in one's "going to heaven." In order to maintain the connection between a man's religious experience and humanity it is necessary to stress the Kingdom of God in the idea of regeneration.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Rauschenbusch finds that the word "faith" which has such an important place in the terminology of salvation is enriched by the religious understanding of the Social Gospel. He notes that the aspect of faith which is emphasized by the Social Gospel is that of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews where faith is viewed as launching life toward the unknown future. Such a faith is "not so much the endorsement of ideas formulated in the past, as expectancy and confidence in the coming salvation of God."[2] Faith is again interpreted as meaning prophetic vision. Although in the thought of Rauschenbusch faith does not primarily mean the endorsement of ideas formulated in the past, it does mean the affirmation of the success of the ethics of Jesus when applied to society. This is indicated by the following statement:

> It is faith to assume that this is a good world and that life is worth living. It is faith to assert the feasibility of a fairly righteous and fraternal social order. In the midst of a despotic and predatory industrial life

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 100-101. [2] *Ibid*., pp. 101-102.

> it is faith to stake our business future on the proposition that fairness, kindness, and fraternity will work. When war inflames a nation, it is faith to believe that a peaceable disposition is a workable international policy. Amidst the disunion of Christendom it is faith to look for unity in action. It is faith to see God at work in the world and to claim a share in his job. Faith is an energetic act of the will, affirming our fellowship with God and man, declaring our solidarity with the Kingdom of God, and repudiating selfish isolation.[1]

Even though Rauschenbusch recognizes that in the life of the Christian there is no such thing as a complete transformation of the entire person, he nevertheless affirms both the regeneration of the believer at the time of conversion and also the possibility of the Christian's sanctification. As has been previously pointed out, the question of justification and sanctification constitutes one of the major points of difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr. The exact difference between them on this question will be discussed after Niebuhr's position has been presented, but at present it is important to understand Rauschenbusch's thought on sanctification. Although he does not believe in total sanctification in the sense of a Christian's attaining sinless perfection, he does believe that the Christian will be victorious over sin in many areas of his life. According to Rauschenbusch, justification takes place at the time a person repents of his sins and accepts Christ as his

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 102.

Lord and Saviour. Then justification is followed by sanctification which is "the continuation of that process of spiritual education and transformation by which a human personality becomes a willing organ of the spirit of Christ."[1] In other words, sanctification is a process by which the man who has been justified grows in his dedication to the service of God. As he grows in dedication, by the help of God he gradually overcomes sin in his life, but never to the degree of complete sinlessness. Rauschenbusch's understanding of justification and sanctification is reflected in his social ethics. This point is illustrated by the fact that he expects social institutions to be regenerated or transformed following the repentance of the groups which constitute them. Then after such institutions have been "justified" he expects them to grow in righteousness so that their righteousness will increasingly approximate the righteousness of the Kingdom of God. Again, as in the case of the individual, Rauschenbusch does not expect the institutions of society to attain unto complete sinlessness. Instead, he expects them to be Christianized to the extent that they will increasingly seek the common good of man in accordance with the teachings of Christ rather than for their own selfish desires.[1]

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[1] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch points out that those who accept the Social Gospel can use any methods for the cultivation of the spiritual life as long as they have an ethical outcome. He affirms that the Social Gospel repeats "the message of the Hebrew prophets, that ritual and emotional religion is harmful unless it results in righteousness."[2] Sanctification comes as a result of increased fellowship with God and man. Fellowship, however, is possible only with an exchange of service. Sanctification, therefore, cannot be realized in an unproductive life, except when it is unproductive because of necessity. Rauschenbusch states:

> In the long run the only true way to gain moral insight, self-discipline, humility, love, and consciousness of coherence and dependence, is to take our place among those who serve one another by useful labor. Parasitism blinds; work reveals.[3]

Rauschenbusch sees the Social Gospel as "a distinct type of religious experience."[4] It is a solidaristic religious experience which "is more distinctively Christian than an individualistic religious experience."[1] It is not necessarily Christian "to be afraid of hell or purgatory and desirous of a life without pain or trouble in heaven."[2] Rather it is "self-interest on a higher level."[3] When men are preoccupied with their own destiny, they do not automatically emerge from selfishness. "It only changes its form."[4] Rauschenbusch is anxious to maintain that the Christian experience of regeneration "must have an outlook toward humanity and result in a higher social consciousness."[5] He concludes:

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[1] In fact, as will be pointed out in chapter four of this dissertation, Rauschenbusch wrote in 1912 that four sections of the social order in the United States have been Christianized: the family, the Church, the schools, and the government. Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, pp. 128-155.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 102.

[3] Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[4] Ibid., p. 103.

> The saint of the future will need not only a theocentric mysticism which enables him to realize God, but an anthropocentric mysticism which enables him to realize his fellow-men in God. The more we approach pure Christianity, the more will the Christian signify a man who loves mankind with a religious passion and excludes none. The feeling which Jesus had when he said, "I am the hungry, the naked, the lonely," will be in the emotional consciousness of all holy men in the coming days. The sense of solidarity is one of the distinctive marks of the true followers of Jesus.[6]

2. The Salvation of the Super-Personal Forces

Rauschenbusch stresses the need not only for personal salvation but also for social salvation. In contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch believes it possible for the super-personal forces to be regenerated. He points out that beyond the individual stands the social group as a super-personal entity. It dominates the individual, "assimilating him to its moral standards, and enforcing them by the social sanctions of approval and disapproval."[1] Again in contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch is convinced that "the purpose of all that Jesus said and did and hoped to do was always the social redemption of the entire life of the human race on earth."[2] When the super-personal forces in the world are evil they block the way of redemption for humanity. The strategy of the Kingdom of God would be shortsighted if it did not concentrate on their salvation and conversion.[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

According to Rauschenbusch, "the salvation of composite personalities, like that of individuals, consists in coming under the law of Christ."[4] He finds this illustrated by the cooperative principle in the field of industrial and commercial organization. He sees cooperatives as being under the law of Christ. This is because they are formed on the cooperative principle, which stresses the satisfaction of human wants rather than profit. Their goal is "to distribute ownership, control, and economic benefits to a large number of co-operators."[1] The capitalistic principle of organization, on the other hand, with its emphasis on profit, leads to human exploitation, and is therefore under the law of mammon.[2]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 110.

[2] Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, p. 67.

[3] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, pp. 110-111.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 111.

Rauschenbusch affirms that when super-personal forces come under the law of Christ they are saved. The state which uses it power of coercion to crush offenders as a protection to others is still under brutal law. The state which uses the method of teaching, discipline, and restoration to correct those who have erred, has accepted the law of Christ and is to that degree a saved community. Rauschenbusch points out that "states are known by their courts and prisons and contract labor systems, or by their juvenile courts and parole systems."[3] He believes that "a change in penology may be an evidence of salvation."[4]

Rauschenbusch summarizes his position on the salvation of these super-personal forces as follows:

> The fundamental step of repentance and conversion for professions and organizations is to give up monoply power and the incomes derived from legalized extortion, and to come under the law of service, content with a fair income for honest work. The corresponding step in the case of governments and political oligarchies, both in monarchies and in capitalistic semi-democracies,

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[4] *Ibid.*

> is to submit to real democracy. Therewith they step out of the Kingdom of Evil into the Kingdom of God.[1]

Such statements as the above support the observation that Rauschenbusch never doubts the applicability of the law of Christ to the organizations of society. Neither does he doubt the possibility of repentance and conversion for such giant organizations as the steel industry. He even believes it possible to bring about such conversions by persuasion rather than by coercion. On each of these points Niebuhr raises serious doubts. He believes that when the law of Christ is made directly applicable to the institutions of society, the law itself is lowered. These doubts of Niebuhr will be fully discussed in the section in this chapter on his understanding of social salvation. Before turning to Niebuhr, however, it is important to understand Rauschenbusch's view of the Church, the Kingdom of God, and eschatology.

3. The Church as the Social Factor of Salvation

Rauschenbusch sees the Church as the social factor in salvation. He points out that it brings social forces to oppose evil. According to him, the Church is so important to mankind that if there had never been such an organization as the Church, every great religious thinker would dream of the possibility of founding something like it.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

> He would imagine the happy life within it where men shared the impulses of love and the convictions about life which Jesus imparted to humanity. If he understood psychology and social science, he would see the possibilities of such a social group in arousing and guiding the unformed spiritual aspirations of the young and reinforcing wayward consciences by the approval of the best persons, and its power of reaching by free loyalty springs of action and character lying too deep for civil law and even for education to stir. He might well imagine too how the presence of such a social group would quicken and balance the civil and political community.[1]

Rauschenbusch is well aware of the fact that the actualities of church life do not measure up to such an ideal forecast. He believes, however, that amid the failures of the Church the social factor in salvation is still clear. A disembodied spirit of Christianity would have little influence on men. Nothing lasts that is not organized, but if it is organized by men, one must put up with the weaknesses of men in it. The Church has made claims for itself which no organization conducted by human beings can fulfill. Rauschenbusch holds that the Church should be seen as an attempt to give social expression to the life derived from its founder, Jesus Christ. Then when it falls short of the ideal the disappointment will not be too great.[2]

While recognizing the failures of the Church, Rauschenbusch still affirms that there is certain ground for a belief in its indispensableness for salvation. He agrees with Josiah Royce by pointing out that if an individual is saved, he must be saved by membership in a community which possesses salvation. Rauschenbusch writes:

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 119-120. [2] _Ibid_., pp. 120-123.

> When a man becomes loyal to a community, he identifies himself with its life; he appropriates its past history and memories, its experiences and hopes, and absorbs its spirit and faith. This is the power which can lift him above his own level.
>
> The Christian religion possesses such a community.[1]

Rauschenbusch realizes, however, that if the Church is to possess the power of salvation, it must embody Christ. "He is the revolutionary force within it."[2] In the thought of Rauschenbusch, "the saving qualities of the Church depend on the question whether it has translated the personal life of Jesus Christ into the social life of its group and thus brings it to bear on the individual."[3] He affirms that the claims and powers of any Church are tested by "the continuity of the apostolic faith within it and by its possession of the law and spirit of Jesus."[4] The saving power of the Church does not depend "on its institutional character, on its continuity, its ordination, its ministry, or its doctrine."[5] Rather it depends "on the presence of the Kingdom of God within her."[6]

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 125-127.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 128.

[3] _Ibid_.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 129.

[5] _Ibid_.

[6] _Ibid_.

As has just been indicated, Rauschenbusch believes that the saving ability of the Church depends upon its translating the personal life of Jesus into the social life of its group. He does not inquire as to whether this is a possibility, but rather assumes it. This assumption is reflected in his social ethics in that he expects a social group to be able to practice the ethics of Jesus. This is, of course, one of the major differences between the social ethics of Walter Rauschenbusch and that of Reinhold Niebuhr. It is a difference that has frequently appeared throughout this thesis, and that will be dealt with in greater detail later. In the meantime it is important to understand Rauschenbusch's view of the Kingdom of God.

4. The Kingdom of God

The doctrine of the Kingdom of God has the central place in the theology of Rauschenbusch. According to him, all other doctrines need to be revised "so that they will articulate organically with it."[1] He describes the Kingdom of God as follows:

> The Kingdom of God is divine in its origin, progress and consummation. It was initiated by Jesus Christ, in whom the prophetic spirit came to its consummation, it is sustained by the Holy Spirit, and it will be brought

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 131. The importance of the Kingdom of God in the thought of Rauschenbusch has also been pointed out on pages 29-30 and on page 35 in the first chapter of this dissertation.

> to its fulfillment by the power of God in his own time. . . . The Kingdom of God, therefore, is miraculous all the way, and is the continuous revelation of the power, the righteousness, and the love of God.[1]

The establishment of a community of righteousness amoung men is seen by Rauschenbusch as just as much a part of God's salvation as the saving "of an individual from his natural selfishness and moral inability."[2] The Kingdom of God involves more than just ethics. The doctrine is essential "to establish that organic union between religion and morality, between theology and ethics, which is one of the characteristics of the Christian religion."[3] Moral actions gain religious quality by being consciously related to the Kingdom of God.

Rauschenbusch points out that the theology of the Christian religion is found in the Kingdom of God. He notes that "it translates theology from the static to the dynamic."[4] It does not concentrate on the preservation of doctrines or rites, but rather on "the resistance to be overcome and the great ends to be achieved."[5] The Kingdom of God is distinguished by conflict with evil until organized sin is defeated. It is the goal to which God is lifting mankind. "It is realized not only by redemption, but also by the education of mankind and the revelation of his [God's] life within it."[6]

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 139.

[2] _Ibid_., pp. 139-140.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 140.

[4] _Ibid_.

[5] _Ibid_.

[6] _Ibid_.

According to Rauschenbusch, since the Kingdon of God involves God's reign, it is "always both present and future."[1] It is "eternal in the midst of time."[2] In regard to energy, "It is the energy of God realizing itself in human life."[3] As to its future, it "lies among the mysteries of God."[4] Rauschenbusch affirms that none of the "theories about the future of the Kingdom of God are likely to be valuable or true which paralyze or postpone redemptive action on our part."[5] He states:

> It is for us to see the Kingdom of God as always coming, always pressing in on the present, always big with possibility, and always inviting immediate action. We walk by faith. Every human life is so placed that it can resist and retard its progress. The Kingdom is for each of us the supreme task and the supreme gift of God. By accepting it as a task, we experience it as a gift. By labouring for it we enter into the joy and peace of the Kingdom as our divine fatherland and habitation.[6]

Rauschenbusch describes the Kingdom of God as "humanity organized according to the will of God."[7] He is certain that the Kingdom of God "tends toward a social order which will best guarantee to all men their freest and highest development."[8] He affirms that "since love is the supreme law of Christ, the Kingdom of God implies a progressive reign of love in human affairs."[9] The advance of the Kingdom of God is seen "wherever the free will of love supersedes the use of force and legal coercion as a regulative of the social order."[1] Rauschenbusch believes "the highest expression of love is the free surrender of what is truly our own, life, property, and rights."[2] He observes that a much lower expression of love is the giving up of the opportunity to exploit men. In regard to international relations, the reign of love favors "the progressive unity of mankind, but with the maintenance of individual liberty and the opportunity of nations to work out their own national peculiarities and ideals."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 140.

[2] Ibid., p. 141

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 142.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

It is the opinion of Rauschenbusch that the Kingdom as the supreme goal of God is the purpose for the existence of the Church. He notes that the spiritual authority and honor of the Church is measured by the degree to which it fulfills this purpose. "The institutions of the Church, its activities, its worship, and its theology must in the long run be tested by its effectiveness in creating the Kingdom of God."[4]

Since Rauschenbusch understands the Kingdom as the supreme goal of God, he believes that all problems of personal salvation must be interpreted from the point of view of the Kingdom. It is not sufficient to set the Kingdom and personal salvation side by side. There must be a synthesis between them, and theology has the task of explaining how they react on each other. The entire redemptive work of Christ needs to be rethought under this orientation. Rauschenbusch writes:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 142-143

[2] Ibid., p. 143

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

> If the Kingdom of God was the guiding idea and chief end of Jesus--as we now know it was--we may be sure that every step in His life, including His death, was related to that aim and its realization, and when the idea of the Kingdom of God takes its due place in theology, the work of Christ will have to be interpreted afresh.[1]

It is recognized by Rauschenbusch that the Kingdom of God is not limited to the Church and its activities. Rather, it includes the whole of human life. "It is the Christian transfiguration of the social order."[2] The Church as understood by Rauschenbusch is "one social institution alongside of the family, the industrial organization of society, and the State."[3] The Kingdom of God embraces all of these, and fulfills itself through them all. Rauschenbusch believes that "the Church is indispensable to the religious education of humanity and to the conservation of religion, but the greatest future awaits religion in the public life of humanity."[4]

The doctrine of the Kingdom of God is another religious truth about which Niebuhr differs sharply with Rauschenbusch. As with the ethic of love, Rauschenbusch sees the

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 144

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[4] *Ibid.*

Kingdom of God as being at least in part an historical possibility. With him its coming will not be primarily an apocalyptic event unrelated to preceeding historical development. In his earlier writings Rauschenbusch apparently expected both an earlier and an easier realization of the Kingdom than he expected in his later writings written during World War I.[1] Niebuhr, on the other hand, does not optimistically believe in an earthly Kingdom of God. It is an ideal which influences man as both a judgement and a goal, but man will never realize it on earth. Rather it is primarily futuristic and will only be realized beyond history. As will be indicated in the next chapter, Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr's understanding of the Kingdom of God is clearly reflected in their social ethics. Rauschenbusch expects far more from society than does Niebuhr, but at the same time Niebuhr does not set a limit on the possibilities of society.

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[1] In regard to the progress of the coming of the Kingdom, it must be pointed out that Rauschenbusch varies in his expectations. In his earlier writings, especially before World War I, he was much more optimistic: "The largest and hardest part of the work of christianizing the social order has been done." (Christianizing the Social Order, p. 124.) Then in his final book, written after the beginning of World War I, he sees that the road to the Kingdom is not a smooth one. (A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 226.) This fact that Rauschenbusch varies in his expectations of progress is pointed out by Roger L. Shinn in Christianity and the Problem of History, p. 124.

D. The Second Coming and Salvation: Eschatology

Rauschenbusch no longer sees the need to use such traditional terms as the Second Coming, the last judgment, and the resurrection. He writes:

> But what is the use of the judgment if the fate of every man is decided at his death and he goes directly to heaven or hell? And why should a Christian of the first century receive his body again at the general resurrection when he has lived in heaven without it for eighteen hundred years?[1]

In other words, in the opinion of Rauschenbusch if the above terms are not to be taken literally they should be dispensed with. He believes that Jesus himself was trying to become emancipated from apocalypticism.[2] This position is certainly in contrast to that of Niebuhr who holds on to these eschatological terms and centers his own doctrine of eschatology around them. He does, however, reject their literal meaning as emphatically as does Rauschenbusch.

According to Rauschenbusch, eschatology is concerned with the future of the individual after death and with the ultimate destiny of the human race. Eschatology is inseparable from religion. The Christian faith must have a Christian eschatology. Rauschenbusch states:

> To be satisfying to the Christian consciousness any teaching concerning the future life of the individual must express that high valuation of the eternal worth of the soul which we have learned from Christ, and must

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 221.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

> not contradict or sully the revelation of the justice, love, and forgiving mercy of our heavenly Father contained in his words, his life, and his personality. Any doctrine about the future of the race which is to guide our thought and action, must view it from distinctively Christian, ethical points of view, and must not contradict what is historically and scientifically certain.[1]

Rauschenbusch believes that in order to reform eschatology it is necessary to take into consideration its inherited contents along with its Biblical and theological sources. He points out that in interpreting the Old Testament, one must distinguish between what is due to the divine inspiration of the prophets and that which comes from mythical ideas. Those elements of the Old Testament which carry authority are those "in spiritual consensus with the revelation of God in Christ."[2] Rauschenbusch feels that the prophecy must be distinguished from apocalypticism for the latter exercises a dangerous influence on present-day religion. In fact, apocalypticism has probably discredited eschatology more than any other single influence. Even in the New Testament one must sift out what is clearly Christian in origin and spirit. The various eschatologies of the New Testament must be seen side by side rather than mangled and forced into conformity. The Biblical writers did not all think alike.[3] Rauschenbusch insists on the need for a sound view on what Jesus thought of the future. He thinks that for an understanding of Jesus' position, it is essential to know that "apocalypticism was part of the environment in which he began his thinking; it was not his personal product; he was emancipating himself from it."[1] It must also be realized that the eschatological schemes of the primitive Church were based on the supposition that the end of the world would come soon. Finally, one must keep in mind that the early Catholic Church changed the primitive eschatology by identifying the future of the Church with the future of Christianity.[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[2] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[3] Ibid., pp. 216-217.

Keeping in mind the above considerations, Rauschenbusch sets forth a few constructive propositions about the future of the race. He believes that the future development of the race should have an important place in Christian teaching. All Christian thinking on the past and the future must be religious, and filled with the awareness of God in man's affairs.[3] Rauschenbusch notes:

> History is a revelation of God's will. God thinks in action, and speaks in events. His historical realities are a surer word of God than any prophecy. The least of us today knows things which would have revolutionized the eschatology of the apostles.[4]

> God is in history. He has the initiative. Where others see blind forces working dumb agony, we must see

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

> moral will working toward redemption and education. A religious view of history involves a profound sense of the importance of moral issues in social life. Sin ruins; righteousness establishes, and love consolidates. In the last resort the issues of future history lie in the moral qualities and religious faith of nations. This is the substance of all Hebrew and Christian eschatology.[1]

Rauschenbusch sees a need for the renewal of the millennial hope which the Catholic Church left out of eschatology. Though it was crude in its form, it was completely right in its substance because "the ideal of a social life in which the law of Christ shall prevail, and in which its prevalence shall result in peace, justice and glorious blossoming of human life is a Christian ideal."[2] Rauschenbusch writes:

> Our chief interest in any millennium is the desire for a social order in which the worth and freedom of every least human being will be honoured and protected; in which the brotherhood of man will be expressed in the common possession of the economic resources of society; and in which the spiritual good of humanity will be set high above the private profit interests of all materialistic groups. We hope for such an order for humanity as we hope for heaven for ourselves.[3]

Rauschenbusch thus hopes for the realization of the millennium within history. This hope is reflected in his social ethics in that it leads him to expect far more in history than the facts of human nature warrant. Rauschenbusch's position on this issue stands in contrast to that of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 223-224. [2] Ibid., p. 224.

[3] Ibid.

Niebuhr. The latter while not limiting the possibility of history does not expect as much in the way of a millennium within history as does Rauschenbusch.

As to the manner in which the Christian ideal of socity will come, Rauschenbusch suggests that one must shift from the category of catastrophe to that of development. By using developmental terms in regard to the coming of the Kingdom, one expresses his faith "in the immanence of God and in the presence of Christ."[1] Jesus visualized the Kingdom as present and future. The coming of the Kingdom will mean "the regeneration of the super-personal life of the race, and will work out a social expression of what was contained in the personality of Christ."[2]

Rauschenbusch foresees that the coming of the Kingdom will not be by peaceful development alone, but by a real struggle with the Kingdom of Evil.[3] Exactly how much in the way of physical coercion Rauschenbusch is willing to consent to is not easy to determine. Certainly in his earlier writings he tends toward the pacifist position. Writing in 1912, he states:

> Violence calls out violence. "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword." (Matt. 26:52) Evil is not permanently lessened by counter-evil. This must be one of the differentiating marks of those who seek social salvation under the leadership of Jesus: to

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[1] Ibid., p. 225.

[2] Ibid., pp. 225-226.

[3] Ibid., p. 226.

> refuse violent means, however tempting, and to throw all fighting ardor into moral protest.[1]

Rauschenbusch strongly opposed the entrance of the United States into World War I. Then after the United States had actually become involved in the war he could say that the stress on continuous development does not eliminate the possibility and value of catastrophes. He writes:

> Political and social revolutions may shake down the fortifications of the Kingdom of Evil in a day. The Great War is a catastrophic stage in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Its direct effects will operate for generations. Our descendants will have a better perspective than we to see how all the sins of modern civilization have brought forth death after their own kind, and how the social repentance of nations may lay the foundation for a new beginning.

It thus appears that by 1917 Rauschenbusch came to recognize, in a way that he had not recognized before, the value of coercion in bringing about justice in society. If this is true, then his more mature thought on social ethics is much closer to that of Niebuhr than is his earlier thought.[3] Perhaps had Rauschenbusch lived longer, his social ethics as a whole would have reflected what he learned through the experience of the war.

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 59.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 226.

[3] The fact that both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr recognize the value of coercion must not, however, be construed as meaning that they give their unqualified approval to it.

Rauschenbusch affirms that there is no final consummation to an eschatology which is set forth in terms of historic development. "Its consummations are always the basis for further development."[1] The Kingdom of God is always in the process of coming. A progressive Kingdom of righteousness comes about in installments like individual sanctification. Rauschenbusch states:

> Our race will come to an end in due time; the astronomical clock is already ticking which will ring in the end. Meanwhile we are on the march toward the Kingdom of God, and getting our reward by every fractional realization of it which makes us hungry for more. A stationary humanity would be a dead humanity. The life of the race is in its growth.[2]

Rauschenbusch believes that there is no inherent contradiction between the hope of mankind's development toward the Kingdom of God and the hope for the future life of the individual after death. He points out, however, that "belief in a future life is not essential to religious faith."[3] It is not self-evident that men will survive death. This hope is affirmed by "a tremendous assertion of faith." The hope of a higher life for the race still leaves unsolved the problem of the individual. Man has a more meaningful hope when he looks forward to eternal life for himself in addition to a better destiny for the race.[4]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 227.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 232-233.

[4] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

Rauschenbusch points out that the most unattractive element in the orthodox doctrine of the future life is the "immediate fixity" of the two states of heaven and hell. This idea of a fixed condition is unlike any life men know. Men want the possibility of growth. One's sense of justice would be better satisfied "to think of an unlimited scale of ascent toward God, reaching from the lowest to the highest, within which every spirit would hold the place for which it was fitted, and each could advance as it grew."[1] Rauschenbusch writes:

> Believers in the social gospel will probably agree that some people have deserved hell and ought to get theirs. But no man, in any human sense of justice, has deserved an eternity of hell. On the other hand, it jars our sense of justice to see some individuals go to heaven totally exempt. They have given hell to others and ought to have a taste of it somewhere, even if they are regenerate and saved men.[2]

Rauschenbusch believes that this idea of the future life would satisfy one's Christian faith in the redeeming mercy of God. He is convinced that no real requirement is satisfied by the idea of the two fixed groups. Men rightly feared the earlier Universalist doctrine that all men automatically entered heaven at death. Such a doctrine took sin too lightly and offended men's sense of justice. On the other hand, "the idea of a scale of life in which each would be as far from God and in as much darkness and narrowness as he deserved, would constitute a grave admonition to every soul."[1] This concept would contain a greater "summons to self-discipline than the present idea that as long as a man is saved at all, he is saved ompletely and escapes all consequences."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 232-233. [2] Ibid., p. 233.

Rauschenbusch realizes that some of his ideas about the future life "are simply the play of personal fancy about a fascinating subject."[3] There are only a few things which he would claim with any assurance, and these are based "on the substance of the gospel of Christ."[4] They are:

> that the love of God will go out forever to his children, and especially to the neediest, drawing them to him and, where necessary, saving them; that personality energized by God is ever growing; that the law of love and solidarity will be even more effective in heaven than on earth; and that salvation, growth, and solidarity are conditioned on interchange of service.[5]

According to Rauschenbusch, Christ thought of the Kingdom of God as coming from heaven to earth. The Kingdom exists in heaven; it must be created on earth. All true earthly joys are derived from partial realizations of the Kingdom of God. Man's future joy will be found "in living within the full realization of the Kingdom."[6] One's work for the Kingdom here will be his preparation for his future participation within it. A man's qualification for the life of heaven will be determined by the degree to which he has absorbed the laws of the Kingdom into his character. Rauschenbusch concludes:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 233-235.

[2] Ibid., p. 235.

[3] Ibid., p. 238.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., pp. 238-239.

> If in any respect we have not been saved from the Kingdom of Evil, we shall be aliens and beginners in the Kingdom of God. Thus heaven and earth are to be parts of the same realm. Spiritual influences come to us. When our life is in God it has continuity.[1]

In this first major division of this chapter, the writer has presented Rauschenbusch's understanding of personal and social salvation. It has been shown that Rauschenbusch considers the problem of salvation to be primarily how man in his finiteness and ignorance can be delivered from the forces of evil which lead him into sin. The answer to the problem of salvation is found in the Christ who initiated the Kingdom of God. The divine quality of this Christ's personality is explained in terms of his God-consciousness and of the free and ethical acts of his will. The meaning of the atonement is set forth according to Rauschenbusch's understanding of how Jesus bore the sins of man, how his death affected God, and how it affects man. Rauschenbusch believes that Jesus bore the sins of man by bearing the brunt of such public sins as religious bigotry, mob rule, and militarism. When any man either by his conscious actions or by his passive consent repeats the sins which ended Jesus' life, he makes himself guilty of the death of Jesus. Rauschenbusch notes that if God is thought of in a human way, then Jesus' death may have been a great experience for God which may even have placed forgiving love in the heart of God. The death of Christ affects man in three important ways: it makes known to him the power of sin in humanity; it gives to him the supreme revelation of the love of God; and it strengthens prophetic religion among men.

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[1] *Ibid.*

Personal salvation is spoken of by Rauschenbusch as being "the voluntary socializing of the soul."[1] The process of salvation begins when a person repents of his sins and accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior. Sanctification is "the continuation of that process of spiritual education and transformation by which a human personality becomes a willing organ of the spirit of Christ."[2] Along with personal salvation, Rauschenbusch stresses the need for social salvation. He believes that such super-personal forces as corporations and governments can be regenerated by coming under the law of Christ, the law of love and service to others. Corporations come under the law of Christ by giving up monopoly power and excessive profits, and governments by submitting to real democracy. Rauschenbusch affirms that the purpose of Jesus' life was the social redemption of humanity on earth.

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 99

[2] _Ibid_., p. 102

Rauschenbusch speaks of the Church as the social factor in salvation. It has the task of bringing social forces to oppose evil, and should be recognized as an attempt to give public expression to the life which proceeds from its founder Jesus Christ. If an individual is to be saved, he must be saved by belonging to a community which has salvation. The saving ability of the Church is dependent upon whether it has translated the life of Christ into the social life of its community. The Kingdom of God is defined by Rauschenbusch as "humanity organized according to the will of God,"[1] or as "the Christian transfiguration of the social order."[2] For Rauschenbusch it is not primarily futuristic for it is at least in part an historical possibility. As for eschatology, Rauschenbusch hopes for the realization of the millennium within history, and for the spiritual development of both the "saved" and the "lost" beyond history.

Now that Rauschenbusch's understanding of personal and social salvation has been presented, it is time to discuss Niebuhr's position on this same topic. In this way it will be possible to determine exactly wherein Niebuhr is in agreement or disagreement with Rauschenbusch, and how this is reflected in Niebuhr's social ethics.

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[1] Ibid., p. 142. [2] Ibid., p. 145.

II. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SALVATION AS UNDERSTOOD BY REINHOLD NIEBUHR

The following discussion is largely based on the second volume of the Gifford Lectures, Human Destiny. In it Niebuhr presents his understanding of the Christian doctrine of salvation. According to him, man may be justified, but not freed from sin within history.[1] Niebuhr believes that for a social ethics to be effective it must always take into consideration the sinfulness of man on every level of his existence.[2]

A. The Problem of Salvation

The problem of salvation is well summed up by Niebuhr in the following quotation:

> The issue of Biblical religion is not primarily the problem of how finite man can know God but how sinful man is to be reconciled to God and how history is to overcome the tragic consequences of its "false eternals," its proud and premature efforts to escape finiteness.[3]

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[1] On page 49 in The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, Niebuhr speaks of sin as "overcome in principle, but not in fact." He now feels that this is "an inadequate way of doing justice to the fact that there is sin in the life of the redeemed, that is, to the Reformation principle justus et peccator simul. It is inadequate because it does not describe the real sanctification which takes place in conversion when the soul turns from itself to God." (Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 437.)

[2] There is a helpful discussion of Niebuhr's view of personal salvation in the book by Mary Frances Thelen, Man as Sinner in Contemporary American Realistic Theology (Morningside Heights, New York: King's Crown Press, 1946) pp. 102-111.

[3] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1, p. 147.

Biblical religion sets forth the "problems of historical action in more tragic terms than in any culture religion."[1] It proclaims that man is caught in a situation from which he is unable to remove himself by his own power. When he does endeavor to do so, he becomes more involved in sin. This may happen upon different levels of culture. Niebuhr does not deny that there is a difference between primitive bigotry and civilized tolerance. But man will never reach such a high level as to escape the vicious circle. At the exact moment he thinks he has escaped it he is most deeply involved in it. Thus is revealed the tragedy of self-righteousness.[2]

According to Niebuhr, the basic problem of life is sin rather than finiteness. This does not mean that the problem of finiteness is eliminated. Niebuhr recognizes that a man who stands within an historical process is so limited in vision that he cannot discern the full meaning of that process, and so limited in power that he cannot fulfill the meaning. It follows that

> the temporal problem of human history and destiny in historical religions is how the transcendent meaning of history is to be disclosed, since man can discern only partial meanings and can only partially realize the meanings he discerns. In modern corruptions of historical religions this problem is solved very simply by the belief that the cumulative effects of history will endow weak man with both the wisdom and the power

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[1] Niebuhr, "Religion and Action," Religion and the Modern World, p. 103.

[2] Ibid., pp. 103-104.

> to discern and to fulfill life's meaning.
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> In the more profound versions of historical religion it is recognized, however, that there is no point in history, whatever the cumulations of wisdom and power, in which the finiteness of man is overcome so that he could complete his own life, or in which history as such does not retain the ambiguity of being rooted in nature-necessity on the one hand while pointing towards transcendent, "eternal" and trans-historical ends on the other hand.[1]

Niebuhr defines the basic distinction between historical and non-historical religions and cultures as "the difference between those which expect and those which do not expect a Christ."[2] He notes that "a Christ is expected wherever history is regarded as potentially meaningful but as still awaiting the full disclosure and fulfillment of its meaning."[3] Then Niebuhr goes on to point out that "a Christ is not expected wherever the meaning of life is explained from the standpoint of either nature or supernature in such a way that a transcendent revelation of history's meaning is not regarded as either possible or necessary."[4] He reasons that "the significance of a Christ is that he is a disclosure of the divine purpose, governing history within history."[5]

Niebuhr observes that the problem of the meaning of history for the prophets is "how history can be anything more than judgment, which is to say, whether the promise of history can be fulfilled at all."[1] The prophets recognized that "all history is involved in a perennial defiance of the law of God."[2] They were concerned about whether God had "resources of mercy great enough to redeem as well as to judge all men."[3]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, pp. 3-4.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[5] Ibid., p. 5.

The above analysis of the problem of salvation is quite different from that of Rauschenbusch. He sees the problem of salvation as being primarily how man who is limited in knowledge can be delivered from the sinful forces which lead him astray. In regard to individual man, these forces of evil are such objective factors as his ignorance and his lower nature. In regard to society, they are such super-personal entities as the capitalistic economic system and corrupt political parties. Rauschenbusch is concerned with how finite man can come to know and to be conscious of the presence of God, the truth about man's higher destiny, and the value of each individual. By placing the cause of sin primarily in factors outside man and so subject to man's correction rather than in the spiritual nature of man, Rauschenbusch is led to expect far more in the way of both personal and social salvation within history than does Niebuhr. The latter sees the problem of salvation primarily in terms of man's need to be reconciled to God. Niebuhr is here primarily concerned about the conquest of man's pride which leads to injustice. By thus stating the problem of salvation, Niebuhr avoids what he considers to be the false optimism of Rauschenbusch. It is a false optimism because it is based on the assumption that sin is caused chiefly by factors outside man which are subject to his correction rather than by factors within man. Such factors within man as his pride and will to power cannot be easily conquered. All of man's acts within history, including even the acts of the "saved" will continue to be tinged with sin.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

B. The First Coming and Salvation

Since Niebuhr believes that the ultimate problem of history is whether God is able to save as well as judge men, he is led to select the atonement as the significant center of the content of the incarnation. In the epic of the life and death of Christ, "the final mystery of the divine power which bears history is clarified; and, with that clarification, life and history are given true meaning."[1] Christ is the revelation of the self-giving love (agape) of God which is the criterion and goal of mutual love (eros). Niebuhr affirms that "sacrificial love (agape) completes the incompleteness of mutual love (eros), for the latter is always arrested by reason of the fact that it seeks to relate life to life from the standpoint of the self and for the sake of the self's own happiness."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Niebuhr affirms that the life and death of Christ are the revelation of God's character. In particular they refer to "the unsolved problem of the relation of God's judgment to His mercy, and of his wrath to His forgiveness."[2] In the cross of Christ is found the assurance that judgment is not the last word of God to man. This does not mean, however, that the mercy of God as forgiveness destroys the distinctions of good and evil in history so as to make judgment meaningless. Niebuhr states:

> The good news of the gospel is that God takes the sinfulness of man into Himself; and overcomes in His own

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[1] Ibid., p. 82. Niebuhr disagrees with Professor Anders Nygren's understanding of agape and eros in the latter's book of that name. Niebuhr believes that Nygren makes the contrast between agape and eros too absolute. The latter makes agape too exclusively God's type of love and eros too much of a selfish human love. Niebuhr states that Nygren points out "the contrast between the pure and disinterested love which the New Testament regards as normative and the egotistic element which is connoted in all love doctrines (eros) of classical thought. But he makes the contrast too absolute. Non-Christian conceptions of love do indeed seek to justify love from the standpoint of the happiness of the agent; but the freedom of man is such that he is not without some idea of the virtue of love which does not justify itself in terms of his own happiness. It is significant that Jesus does not regard the contrast between natural human love and the divine agape as absolute. He declares: 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him' (Mt. 7:11)." (Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 84.)

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1, p. 142.

> heart what cannot be overcome in human life, since human life remains within the vicious circle of sinful self-glorification on every level of moral advance.
>
> This is rightly regarded as the final revelation of the personality of God. It is final because it is the revelation of God's freedom in the highest reaches of its transcendence. . . .
>
> Christian faith regards the revelation of Christ as final because this ultimate problem [the relation of God's judgment to His mercy] is solved by the assurance that God takes man's sin upon Himself and into Himself and that without this divine initiative and this divine sacrifice there could be no reconciliation and no easing of Man's uneasy conscience. This revelation is final not only as a category of interpreting the total meaning of history but also as a solution for the problem of the uneasy conscience in each individual.[1]

The sufferings of Christ reveal God's suffering. Niebuhr understands the suffering of God as being "on the one hand the inevitable consequence of sin's rebellion against goodness; and on the other hand the voluntary acceptance by divine love of the consequence of sin."[2] According to the classical Christian idea of the atonement, God is both the propitiator and the propitiated. There can be no simple cancellation of God's wrath by His mercy. Niebuhr defines the wrath of God as "the world in its essential structure reacting against the sinful corruptions of the structure."[3] The mercy of God, on the other hand, "represents the ultimate freedom of God above His own law;

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

[2] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, pp. 55-56.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

but not the freedom to abrogate the law."[1] Niebuhr writes:

> The fact that God cannot overcome evil without displaying in history His purpose to take the effects of evil upon and into Himself, means that the divine mercy cannot be effective until the seriousness of sin is fully known. The knowledge that sin causes suffering to God is an indication of the seriousness of sin. It is by that knowledge that man is brought to despair. Without this despair there is no possibility of the contrition which appropriates the divine forgiveness.[1]

Niebuhr points out that the truth of the atonement is not simply a truth of history which is laid hold of by reason. Rather, "it must be constantly apprehended inwardly by faith, because it is a truth which transcends the human situation in each individual just as it transcended the total cultural situation historically."[2] As faith uses our natural endowments it "draws on poetic and imaginative capacities rather than rational ones."[3] The heart of the Christian message is that a clue to the character of God is found in the character and the drama of Christ. That is to say that "the similarity of love between God and Christ is partly revealed by the dissimilarity of power in the historical and trans-historical."[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[3] Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, pp. 143-144.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 144

The divine goodness forms a portion of the divine majesty and power. In history, however, the divine goodness can appear "only in powerless, rather than powerful, terms."[1] The heart of the cross is "its revelation of the fact that the final power of God over man is derived from the self-imposed weakness of his love."[2] It is of particular significance for his social ethics that Niebuhr affirms that "it is impossible to symbolize the divine goodness in history in any other way than by complete powerlessness, or rather by consistent refusal to use power in the rivalries of history."[3] He believes that "there is no self in history or society, no matter how impartial its perspective upon the competitions of life, which can rise to the position of a disinterested participation in those rivalries and competitions."[4] Disinterested love can only be symbolized by a self which refuses to participate in conflicts. Any participation in them involves "the assertation of one ego interest against another."[5] Niebuhr states:

> For this reason the ethics of nonresistance as taught in the Sermon on the Mount is in perfectly consistent relation with the love symbolized in the Cross. Modern Christianity is wrong, however, in presenting

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 134.

[3] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 72.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

> this ethic as one which might, if generally practiced, become successful im history. It is even more mistaken if it declares that a non-violent participation in all the claims and counterclaims of historical social life preserves the essentials of the gospel ethic of nonresistance.[1]

The above position of Niebuhr in regard to Christ's participation in the conflicts of history stands in sharp contrast to the position of Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch proclaims that Jesus did participate in the conflicts and competitions of history. Throughout his life Christ acted in history in order to get a great historical process in motion, the coming of the Kingdom of God. The divine quality of Christ's personality should be based "on free and ethical acts of his will."[2] From the point of view of Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr has placed Christ too much on the edge of history and thus has failed to recognize Christ's prudence and his involvement in conflict. Such conflict is illustrated by his arguments with the Pharisees and the cleansing of the temple. Christ's prudence is indicated by the fact that on occasion he would advise his followers to make terms with an adversary while on the way to see the judge in order to avoid the harsh judgment of the court (Matt. 5:25). Rauschenbusch places his primary emphasis on Christ's life as whole while Niebuhr places his primary emphasis on the death of Christ. The difference in this emphasis is revealed in their socialethics. Since Rauschenbusch believes that throughout the life of Christ, he participated in the rivalries and competitions of society, Rauschenbusch is convinced that the ethic of Jesus is directly applicable to contemporary social problems. Niebuhr, on the other hand, placing his main emphasis on the death of Christ, believes that Jesus refused to participate in the rivalries and competitions of society. Niebuhr, therefore, concludes that the love ethic of Jesus is not directly applicable to contemporary social problems. He also holds that such men as Rauschenbusch are wrong in believing that if the ethic of Jesus were generally practiced it would work in history.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 151.

Niebuhr affirms that the perfect love of Christ comes into the world, but it does not succeed in maintaining itself there. Heholds that the cross "stands at the edge of history and not squarely in history."[1] It is the revelation of "what history ought to be but not what history is or can be."[2] The cross reveals "the nature of the divine and eternal as well as of the ultimate historical possibility and impossibility."[1]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "To Prevent the Triumph of an Intollerable Tyranny, Third in a Series on the Question: If America Is Drawn into War, Can You, As a Christian Participate in It or Support It?" The Christian Century, LVII (December 18, 1940), 1579.

[2] Ibid.

Niebuhr points out that Jesus reveals the mercy of God and that the gospel proclaims that everyone is in need of that mercy. We need God's mercy "because all of us continue to be, even in our highest moral achievements, in contradiction to God and therefore require his mercy."[2] Christ is not a simple possibility for all mankind. Niebuhr declares that in one sense Christ "is not our possibility at all but a revelation of the resources of divine mercy which knows how to overcome the sinful contradiction of human history to its true pattern."[3] Liberal Protestantism has gone wrong by disavowing "all the profounder elements of the gospel which reveal the tragic character of history."[4] Liberals have "made the gospel identical with the truism that all men ought to be good and with the falsehood that goodness pays."[5] In reality, "the end of pure goodness, of perfect love, is the Cross."[6] From the point of view of Niebuhr, the weakness in liberal Protestantism actually goes back to the fact that "its analysis of human nature and human history is fundamentally false."[7]

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[1] _Ibid_. [2] _Ibid_. [3] _Ibid_., pp. 1579-1580.
[4] _Ibid_., p. 1580. [5] _Ibid_. [6] _Ibid_.
[7] _Ibid_.

Niebuhr points out that although God reveals Himself in history through Christ, this truth "is partly obscured by the terms used to affirm it."[1] This tendency is illustrated by the theory of the two natures of Christ. This theory is so worded that "early Christian thought is forced to state its conviction about Jesus' historical and human character on the one hand, and his significance as the revelation of the divine on the other."[2] Niebuhr is convinced that "by stating this double facet of Christ in ontic terms, a truth of faith, which can be expressed only symbolically, is transmuted into a truth of speculative reason."[3] According to the formula of Chalcedon and the Nicene creed, Christ is both God and man. It is claimed "that his humanity does not derogate from his divinity or his divinity from his humanity."[4] Niebuhr concludes:

> All definitions of Christ which affirm both his divinity and humanity in the sense that they ascribe both finite and historically conditioned and eternal and unconditioned qualities to his nature must verge on logical nonsense. It is possible for a character, event or fact of history to point symbolically beyond history and to become a source of disclosure of an eternal meaning, purpose and power which bears history. But it is not possible for any person to be historical and unconditioned at the same time. But the logical nonsense is not as serious a defect as the fact that the statement tends to reduce Christian faith to metaphysical truths which need not be apprehended inwardly by faith. The relation between "power" and "wisdom" is thereby

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 60.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

> destroyed because the final truth about life is not apprehended in such a way that the "existing individual" (Kierkegaard) is shattered in his self-esteem at the very center of his being.[1]

As has been previously pointed out, Rauschenbusch also opposes metaphysical questions such as the problem of the two natures of Christ. This, however, does not prevent Rauschenbusch from offering his own explanation of the person of Christ in terms of his God-consciousness and of the independent and moral acts of his will. Niebuhr answers Rauschenbusch's position on the God-consciousness of Jesus as follows:

> If the revelation in Christ had been merely the record of a high form of "God consciousness," or merely the culmination of man's search after God, or the portrayal of a high type of virtue, if Christ had merely revealed God to us by symbolizing divine goodness in his own goodness (which are the interpretations of Christian revelation in liberal Christianity), the revelation would have stood complete in itself. It would have been an historic fact or a form of historic striving which man comprehends and apprehends by his reason and appropriates for the sake of his growing wisdom and his developing culture. But such interpretations of life and faith do not proceed from a radical or profound analysis of the problem of life. They assume that the problem of life is to discover the highest form of goodness; to learn what is "worthy of man's highest form of goodness; to learn what is "worthy of man's highest devotion." They do not understand life in its twofold character of involvement in finiteness and transcendence over it; or the further complication of the corruption of sin which is the consequence of premature and self-sufficient efforts to escape from the weakness, dependence and insufficiency of the human situation.
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> Wherever history is understood as solving its own problems by the cumulation of knowledge and wisdom and the consequent increase of virtue; whenever the complexities of history's relation to eternity are not

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

> known to be characteristic of history on every level of its development, the Christian claim that God has been revealed in Christ cannot be taken seriously. This is why liberal Christianity can give no satisfactory answer to the question why Christ, rather than some other "good" character of history, should be revered as divine, or how we can have the assurance than an evolutionary development may not produce a higher form of "goodness" more worthy of our "higher devotion."[1]

In his discussion of the sinlessness of Christ, Niebuhr affirms that "to be tempted means in a sense to have sinned; for temptation is a state of anxiety from which sin flows inevitably."[2] This anxiety accompanies finite and insecure existence. Because of this "it is not possible . . . to assert the sinlessness of every individual act of any actually historical character."[3] It may be asserted that "in Jesus there is a remarkable coincidence and consistency of doctrine, of purpose and act."[4] If Christ's life and doctrine were not consistent with his death on the cross, the cross could not have the symbolic significance for Christianity which it possesses. Niebuhr believes that "the Cross symbolizes the perfection of love more consistently than any cumulation of individual acts."[5] He states:

> The Cross symbolizes the perfection of agape which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history. It rises above history and seeks conformity to the Divine love rather than harmony with other

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 73. [3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

> human interests and vitalities. This harmony is a desirable end of historical striving; but it can never be a final norm. For sinful egoism makes all historical harmonies of interest partial and incomplete; and a life which accepts these harmonies as final is bound to introduce sinful self-assertion into the ethical norms.
>
> The interpretations which define the sinlessness and perfection of Christ in either metaphysical or legalistic terms can have no real illumination for human conduct.[1]

The perfection of Christ is perceived only "by faith." Niebuhr is convinced that "the effort to reduce that perfection to a simple historical fact, which can be measured in terms of historical norms and standards is to reduce paradox to absurdity."[2] He writes:

> The perfection of agape as symbolized in the Cross can neither be simply reduced to the limits of history, nor yet dismissed as irrelevant because it transcends history. It transcends history as history transcends itself. It is the final norm of a human nature which has no final norm in history because it is not completely contained in history.[3]

The position of Niebuhr on the sinlessness of Christ stands in sharp contrast to that of Rauschenbusch. The latter believes in the complete sinlessness of Jesus. He states that Jesus did not allow himself to "fall into the sin of selfishness, because he succeeded in uniting the service of the common good with the affirmation of his selfhood."[4] As has already been pointed out, this leads

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 75. [3] Ibid.

[4] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 152.

Rauschenbusch to expect the followers of Christ to be victorious over sin in many areas of their lives. From Niebuhr's point of view, Rauschenbusch is unrealistic because every act of even the "redeemed" is tinged with sin. Therefore, the sinfulness of the "righteous" must also be taken into consideration by any realistic social ethics.

According to the thought of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch actually misses much of the true meaning of the cross. He misses it because he trys to reduce the perfection of agape as symbolized in the cross to the limits of history. He also misses it because of his emphasis on giving an objective explanation of exactly how Christ bore the sins of men. Niebuhr holds that the cross must be interpreted symbolically. He affirms that the meaning of the cross must never be removed from the realm of faith and reduced to the status of a simple truth of history which is comprehended by reason. He fears that this is exactly what happens when the atonement is explained by "the canons of common sense." Niebuhr believes that there is a danger that men may come to feel that if they no longer participate in the sins which Rauschenbusch lists as having led to the crucifixion of Christ, then they are no longer guilty of having a part in his death. Such a conviction creates a false sense of righteousness thus leading to the worst type of sin, that of spiritual pride. Niebuhr writes:

> Theologies continue to elaborate systems which either claim the authority of the Cross for the relative norms of history or which raise the perfection of the Cross and the sinlessness of Christ to a position of irrelevance. But meanwhile Christian faith has always understood, beyond all canons of common sense and all metaphysical speculations. that the perfection of the Cross represents the fulfillment -- and the end -- of historical ethics.
>
> The ethical implications of the Cross illumine the actual character of human history.[1]

C. The Interim and Salvation

Niebuhr believes that "the full implication of the double idea that 'the Kingdom of God has come' and that it is 'coming' is that history is an interim."[2] He is convinced that Jesus anticipated both the growth of evil and the growth of good in history. Jesus conceived of history as "an interim between the disclosure of its true meaning and the fulfillment of that meaning."[3] Niebuhr feels that a lasting element of inner contradiction in history must be accepted as its constant characteristic. Love continues "to be suffering love rather than triumphant love."[4]

1. Personal Salvation

As has been previously pointed out, Niebuhr holds that the atonement reveals that sin causes suffering to God. Through this knowledge man is brought to despair. Despair leads to contrition which appropriates the divine forgiveness. Niebuhr states:

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 75.

[2] Ibid., p. 48. [3] Ibid., p. 49. [4] Ibid.

> It is in this contrition and in this appropriation of divine mercy and forgiveness that the human situation is fully understood and overcome. In this experience man understands himself in his finiteness, realizes the guilt of his efforts to escape his insufficiency and dependence and lays hold upon a power beyond himself which both completes his incompleteness and purges him of his false and vain efforts at self-completion.
>
> . . . this final revelation of the divine sovereignty over life and this final disclosure of the meaning of life. . . must be constantly apprehended inwardly by faith.[1]

Niebuhr points out the assertion of the Christian faith that the knowledge of God found in the crucified Christ is both "wisdom" and "power," both "grace" and "truth." He notes that life and history are "now fully known by having found their true end and meaning beyond themselves."[2] At the same time they are also completed and fulfilled."[3] Christ as "power" and as "grace" is mediated to each person who inwardly accepts the truth of the atonement. When this happens "the alternate moods of despair and false hope are overcome and the individual is actually freed to live a life of serenity and creativity."[4]

Niebuhr finds that "the idea of 'power' and 'grace' in Christian thought is ambiguous."[5] On the one hand the Christian is considered as able to fulfill life as it has been revealed to him. On the other hand, he is still within both the limits of history and the contamination of sin. The 'grace' of God is seen on the one hand as "a power of God in man which completes his incompleteness."[1] It is seen on the other hand as "the merciful power of God over man, whereby sin is overcome by God's mercy, but not by human goodness."[2] According to the Christian faith there are two facets to the fulfillment of history:

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 57. [3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

> According to the one there is fulfillment in every moment in which man establishes relation to God in contrition and faith. According to the other, life waits for its fulfillment and "we are saved by hope." These two aspects of fulfillment are in conformity with Christ's own interpretation of the Kingdom as having come and as coming.[3]

According to Niebuhr's understanding of the Christian revelation, it is impossible for man by his own efforts to fulfill the true meaning of his life, and sin is primarily derived from his ineffectual efforts to do so. The Christian faith nevertheless proclaims that in Christ both "wisdom" and "power" are accessible to man. This means "that not only has the true meaning of life been disclosed but also that resources have been made available to fulfill that meaning."[4] In Christ is found "not only 'truth' but 'grace'."[5]

Niebuhr notes that throughout the history of Christianity men have endeavored to relate these two propositions to each other in such a manner that they will not be contradictory. According to the New Testament these two emphases are found in the double implication of the word "grace."

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*, p. 98. [5] *Ibid.*

> Grace represents on the one hand the mercy and forgiveness of God by which He completes what man cannot complete and overcomes the sinful elements in all of man's achievements. Grace is the power of God over man. Grace is on the other hand the power of God in man; it represents an accession of resources, which man does not have of himself, enabling him to become what he truly ought to be. It is synonymous with the gift of the "Holy Spirit.". . .The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God indwelling in man. But this indwelling Spirit never means a destruction of human self-hood. There is therefore a degree of compatibility and continuity between human self-hood and the Holy Spirit.[1]

Niebuhr believes that both these facets of the experience of grace are fully expressed in the Pauline doctrine of grace. Paul does not always make the relation between them explicit.[2] A survey of Pauline thought, however, leads "to the conclusion that there is no contradiction in his elaboration of the doctrine of grace."[3] At least there is no lasting contradiction.

> There is, on the contrary, a profound understanding of the complexities of the spiritual life of man with its possibilities of genuine newness of life in "love, joy and peace" for those who have broken with self-love in principle; and yet of the possibility of sin even on this new level of righteousness.[4]

Niebuhr interprets Paul's words, "I am crucified with Christ," as meaning that the self must be "broken" and

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 98-99.

[2] _Ibid._, pp. 100-101.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 107.

[4] _Ibid._

"shattered." One cannot be saved merely by receiving enlightenment. The necessity of the self being shattered at the very center of its being validates the strategy of evangelistic sects, which seek to bring about the crisis of conversion. Niebuhr describes this process as follows:

> The self is shattered whenever it is confronted by the power and holiness of God and becomes genuinely conscious of the real source and centre of all life. In Christian faith Christ mediates the confrontation of the self by God; for it is in Christ that the vague sense of the divine, which human life never loses, is crystallized into a revelation of a divine mercy and judgment. In that revelation fear of judgment and hope of mercy are so mingled that despair induces repentance and repentance hope.[1]

Repentance is thus "the first key into the door of the Kingdom of God."[2] In other words, "without the godly sorrow that worketh repentance there can be no salvation."[3]

The Pauline expression, "nevertheless I live," is interpreted by Niebuhr as meaning that "the Christian experience of the new life is an experience of a new selfhood."[4] Since the evil circle of self-centeredness has been crushed, the new self is more honestly a real self. "The new self lives in and for others."[5] It endeavors to love God and to be loyal to Him. "The new self is the real self."[1] The possibility of a reconstruction of the self is understood "to be the consequence of 'power' and 'grace' from beyond itself because the true analysis of the plight of the self revealed it to be due to impotence rather than to lack of knowledge."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 109.

[2] Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics, p. 211.

[3] Ibid., p. 212.

[4] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 110.

[5] Ibid.

Niebuhr understands Paul's assertion, "Yet not I; but Christ liveth in Me," as a "negation of a negation." The denial that the self has been broken is now subordinated to another denial on a different level. Niebuhr asks: "Just what does St. Paul mean by this final denial 'Yet not I; but Christ liveth in me'?"[3] He then proceeds to present some implications of this passage:

> There is an ambiguity in this final explication of the relation of the self to Christ which may well be an expression of the double aspect of the Christian experience of grace, to which we have previously alluded . . . .The "yet not I" could be intended to assert merely the "priority of grace," to be a confession by the converted self that its new life is the fruit, not of its own power and volition, but of an accretion of power and an infusion of grace. It could also be intended as an affirmation that the new self is never an accomplished reality; that in every historic concretion there is an element of sinful self-realization, or premature completion of the self with itself at the centre; that, therefore, the new self is the Christ of intention rather than an actual achievement. It is the self only by faith, in the sense that its dominant purpose and intention are set in the direction of Christ as the norm. It is the self only by grace, in the sense that the divine mercy "imputes" the perfection of Christ and accepts the self's intentions for achievements.[4]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 114. [4] Ibid.

Niebuhr writes of grace "as the power not our own."[1] He points out that when one takes the power of sinful self-love seriously he will feel "a sense of gratitude in the experience of release from self."[2] This experience is usually thought of as a miracle which the self could not have attained. "The power which breaks the self-centered will must be perceived as power from beyond the self; and even when it has become incorporated into the new will, its source is recognized in the confession: 'I, yet not I.'"[3]

In regard to a person's responsibility for his own salvation, Niebuhr points out that "only God in Christ can break and reconstruct the sinful self," but the "the self must 'open the door' and is capable of doing so."[4] These two statements are equally true. In fact, each on its own level is unqualifiedly true. At the same time, "either affirmation becomes false if it is made without reference to the other."[5]

Having discussed grace "as the power not our own," Niebuhr then discusses grace "as the forgiveness of our sins."[6] He proceeds upon the assumption that the "negation of the negation" in the Pauline text: "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" has a double connotation. According to the second, the new life is not an accomplished reality. "It is directed to Christ as the norm of life 'by faith,' and it accepts the divine grace which imputes his perfection to the believer."[1] Man is forgiven for his sins as in contrition he turns to God for forgiveness. Niebuhr finds support for this second meaning in the following words of the passage: "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 115. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 118.
[5] Ibid. [6] Ibid., p. 119.

In regard to the relation of justification to sanctification which is so important to Niebuhr's social ethics, he points out that "the real question is not whether we are able to achieve absolute perfection in history."[3] Rather, "the question is whether in the development of the new life some contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose remains."[4] In reality "the issue is whether the basic character of human history, as it is apprehended in the Christian faith, is overcome in the lives of those who have apprehended it."[5]

Niebuhr believes that according to the facts of experience the converted man is in a sense righteous and in another sense he is not. Justification and sanctification go together in the life of the Christian. Justification is continuous. In criticism of modern liberalism, Niebuhr states:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 121. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid.

> The theologies which have sought to do justice to the positive aspects of regeneration have usually obscured the realities of sin which appear on every new level of virtue. This has been true particularly of modern versions of Christian perfectionism; because in them evolutionary and progressive interpretations of history have been compounded with illusions which have a more purely Christian source.[1]

Niebuhr is convinced that "the two sides of the experience of grace are so related that they do not contradict, but support each other."[2] He writes:

> To understand that the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope, that perfection is not a reality but an intention; that such peace as we know in this life is never purely the peace of achievement but the serenity of being "completely known and all forgiven"; all this does not destroy moral ardour or responsibility. On the contrary it is the only way of preventing premature completions of life, or arresting the new and more terrible pride which may find its roots in the soil of humility, and of saving the Christian life from the intolerable pretension of saints who have forgotten that they are sinners.[3]

Niebuhr's position on justification and sanctification is different from that of Rauschenbusch. While neither man believes in complete sanctification within history, Rauschenbusch expects the process of sanctification to follow upon the experience of justification. Although justification may not cause a complete Christian transformation, Rauschenbusch emphasizes that there is a real change in the life of the individual from having his life centered on self to having it centered on God and man. He does not think of justification as being continuous although he recognizes that even the "saved" may still sin. As a justified Christian there are past sins that a man no longer commits and as he experiences sanctification he increasingly becomes a "willing organ of the spirit of Christ."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 125. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch would say that there are sinful acts that a Christian may no longer commit. Niebuhr would admit that a man may cease from being a drunkard or from stealing after he has become a Christian. This does not mean, however, that the contradiction between the human self-will and the divine purpose has been overcome. A man may quit drinking or stealing because it is to his own best interest to do so as well as because he believes it to be in accordance with God's will. For Niebuhr an act which is based upon both enlightened self-interest and the will of God is not a sinless act. The man who so acts is sinning by affirming his own self-interest instead of acting out of complete obedience to God.[2] In fact, from Niebuhr's

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[1] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 102.

p. 102.

[2] The fact that according to Niebuhr even the Christian is conscious of some contradiction between his own desires and the divine purpose should not be construed as meaning that a Christian act must oppose one's self-interest. If this were the case, it is doubtful from the point of view of Niebuhr that man would ever succeed in committing such an act. Niebuhr believes that an act is Christian when the believer acts in the light of the Christian faith to attain the best possible goal. Even both the best possible goal and act, however, will fall short of God's standard as revealed by Christ. Man is still a sinner, but a redeemed one because Christ is for him in spite of the contradiction in his life.

point of view, it is not necessary but inevitable that a man will sin by affirming his own self interest. "For there is no self in history or society, no matter how impartial its perspective upon the competitions of life, which can rise to the position of a disinterested participation in those rivalries and competitions."[1] Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, believes that an act is sinless even if it is based on both enlightened self-interest and the will of God. He accounts for the sinlessness of Jesus by stating that "unlike others, he did not fall into the sin of selfishness, because he succeeded in uniting the service of the common good with the affirmation of his self-hood."[2] Thus while agreeing with Niebuhr that even the justified Christian still affirms his own self-will, Rauschenbusch goes on to deny the contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose in every area of life. In contrast to Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch believes that the basic character of human history as understood by the Christian faith has at least in some areas been overcome by Christians. This Niebuhr denies. He believes that even the "saved" stand in constant need of God's justification. He agrees with

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 72.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 152.

Martin Luther by affirming that man is both justified and a sinner at the same time.

The difference between Raushcenbusch and Niebuhr on the question of justification and sanctification is clearly reflected in their social ethics. As Rauschenbusch expects many areas of the Christian's life to measure up to the divine purpose, so also he expects many areas of community life to measure up to it. Since Niebuhr does not expect any area of the Christian's life to be completely free from sin, he is definitely convinced that it is even more false to expect man in his social life to attain God's purpose.

According to Niebuhr's interpretation ofthe Christian conception of grace, all history is an "interim" between the revelation and the fulfillment of its meaning. This interim is characterized by both positive defilements and partial realizations of the true meaning of life. Redemption is not a guarantee of the destruction of the sinful corruptions. In fact, such corruptions are increased at the very time the redeemed believe themselves to be completely freed from them. The taint of sin upon all historical accomplishments, however, "does not destroy the possibility of such achievements nor the obligation to realize truth and goodness in history."[1] The truth is that "the fulfillments of meaning in history will be more untainted in fact, if purity is not prematurely claimed for them."[1] All of man's activities within history are under this paradox of grace.[2]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 213.

Niebuhr places these activities into two general categories: "the quest for the truth and the achievement of just and brotherly relations with our fellowmen."[3] Within these two categories are found the cultural and the socio-moral problems of history. Niebuhr studies each of these forms of historical activity in order to "see how the paradox of our having, and yet not having either truth or justice in history conforms to the facts; and how our understanding of the paradox influences, or may influence, our actions."[4]

After making an extensive study of the problem of truth, Niebuhr concludes that "whatever instruments or pretensions we use, it is not possible to establish the claim that we have the truth."[5] The truth is still under the paradox of grace. "We may have it; and yet we do not have it."[6] Niebuhr goes on to note that "we will have it the more purely in fact if we know that we have it only in principle."[7]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. The second category will be discussed later in this chapter under the subject of "Social Salvation."

[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., p. 243. [6] Ibid. [7] Ibid.

The toleration of truths that are "opposed to those which we confess is an expression of the spirit of forgiveness in the realm of culture."[1] As is true with all forgiveness, "it is possible only if we are not too sure of our own virtue."[2] In summary:

> Loyalty to the truth requires confidence in the possibility of its attainment; toleration of others requires broken confidence in the finality of our own truth. But if there is no answer for a problem to which we do not have the answer, our shattered confidence generates either defeat (which in the field of culture would be scepticism); or an even greater measure of pretension, meant to hide our perplexities behind our certainties (which in the field of culture is fanaticism).[3]

Often in the field of social ethics there are those such as the communists who claim to have all the truth. They are a perfect example of those who try "to hide their perplexities behind their certainties." The result in the field of culture is a vicious form of fanaticism. Niebuhr's insight into the nature of truth enables him to see through the pretensions of such fanatics as the communists or the segregationists. By thus seeing through their pretensions, Niebuhr is able clearly to point out their falseness.[4] His understanding of the nature of truth represents an insight into the nature of man and society which Rauschenbusch never fully attained.

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[1] *Ibid.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

[4] This point will be illustrated in Chapter IV in the section on racial relations.

2. The Church and Salvation

Niebuhr strongly affirms that "the church is created not by the righteousness of the pharisee but the contrition of the publican; not by the achievement of pure goodness but by the recognition of the sinfulness of all human goodness."[1] In sharp contrast to Rauschenbusch's stress on the sanctification of church members, Niebuhr states that "the church is not a congregation of people who can pride themselves upon their unique goodness."[2] He writes:

> The church is that place in human society where men are disturbed by the word of the eternal God, which stands as judgment upon human aspirations. But it is also the place where the word of mercy, reconciliation and consolation is heard: "Thou dost well that it was in thine heart." Here human incompleteness is transcended though not abolished. Here human sin is overcome by the divine mercy, though man remains a sinner. No church can lift man out of the partial and finite history in which all human life stands. Every interpretation of the church which promises an "efficient grace," by which man ceases to be man and enters prematurely into the Kingdom of God, is a snare and a delusion. The church is not the Kingdom of God. The Church is the place in human society where the Kingdom of God impinges upon all human enterprises through the divine word, and where the grace of God is made available to those who have accepted His judgment.[3]

For Niebuhr the church is that place where both the judgment and the grace of God are proclaimed. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, while not denying this function of the church, places his primary emphasis on the church as an organization which tries to express in society the life derived from Jesus Christ. While Niebuhr recognizes that the church cannot "lift man out of the partial and finite history in which all human life stands,"[1] Rauschenbusch believes that the church has "the power which can lift a man above his own level."[2] Another difference between the two men in regard to the church is that while for Niebuhr "the Church is the place in human society where the Kingdom of God impinges upon all human enterprises through the divine word,"[3] for Rauschenbusch the saving power of the church depends "on the presence of the Kingdom of God within her."[4] He goes on to affirm that the social conception of salvation "makes everything conditional on the spiritual virtues of the church group."[5] From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch could not have made salvation dependent upon a weaker foundation than the spiritual virtues of church members. Niebuhr writes that "the Christian community does not have the perfection of Christ as an assured possession," and that it will show forth the love of Christ "the more surely the less certain it is of its possession."[6]

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[1] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 60.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 127.

[3] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 62.

[4] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 129.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 241.

Niebuhr is critical of any social ethics which places the "righteousness" of one group over against the "unrighteousness" of others. He fears that such a social ethics invites a vicious fanaticism on the part of the "righteous" in their dealings with others. The "righteous" soon forget that they too stand under the judgment of God and also fall far short of the divine standard. Niebuhr believes that such men as Rauschenbusch have failed in their social ethics to recognize the extend of the sinfulness of even the "righteous." This has caused them to believe that the personal life of Jesus can be translated into the social life of the church and eventually into the social life of other institutions as well. From Niebuhr's point of view this is an impossibility.

3. Social Salvation: The Kingdom of God and the Struggle for Justice[1]

This section is of particular importance for an understanding of Niebuhr's social ethics for in it some of his deepest insights into the nature of society will be presented. He finds the struggle for justice to be "as profound a revelation of the possibilities and limits of historical existence as the quest for truth."[1] He is convinced that community is both an individual and a social necessity. This is true because "the individual can realize himself only in intimate and organic relation with his fellowmen."[2] Niebuhr observes that "love is therefore the primary law of his man's nature, and brotherhood the fundamental requirement of his social existence."[3]

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[1] This section will be divided primarily according to the basic divisions of Niebuhr's chapter on the "The Kingdom of God and the Struggle for Justice" in The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, pp. 244-286.

Niebuhr affirms that because "man is a unity of vitality and reason, the social coherence of life can never be purely rational."[4] He continues by noting that "it includes an interpenetration of all powers and potencies, emotional and volitional as well as rational."[5] Due to the power of rational freedom human communities have a higher dimension than the ones of nature. Since man possesses "freedom over the limits of nature in indeterminate regression, . . . no fixed limits can be placed upon either the purity or the breadth of the brotherhood for which men strive in history."[1] It is also true that "no traditional attainment of brotherhood is secure against criticism from a higher historical perspective or safe from corruption on each new level of achievement."[2] The dynamic interpretation of the social process is justified by "the indeterminate character of these possibilities of both good and evil in social and political relations."[3]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 244.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Niebuhr understands "grace" as being related to "nature" as both fulfillment and negation. He believes that "if the contradiction between 'nature' and 'grace' is not recognized, and the continued power of 'nature' in the realm of 'grace' is not conceded, new sins are brought into history by the pretension that sin has been progressively eliminated."[4]

a. The Relation of Justice to Love

"Nature" for Niebuhr "represents the historical possibilities of justice."[5] "Grace" corresponds to the "ideal possibility of perfect love, in which all inner contradictions within the self, and all conflicts and tensions between self and the other are overcome by the complete obedience of all wills to the will of God."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.245.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

[5] *Ibid.*, p.246.

According to Niebuhr, when translated into these terms the Christian conception of the relation of historical justice to the love of the Kingdom of God is a dialectical one."[2] He believes that "love is both the fulfillment and the negation of all achievements of justice in history."[3] Men are obligated "to realize justice in indeterminate degrees; but none of the realizations can assure the serenity of perfect fulfillment."[4] Niebuhr foresees the possibility of higher realizations of historic justice "if it were more fully understood that all such realizations contain contradictions to, as well as approximations of, the ideal of love."[5] In order to have sanctification in the realm of social relations it is necessary to recognize the impossibility of perfect sanctification. Niebuhr writes:

> The paradoxical relation between justice and love is expressed on various levels. . . . Thus the pinnacle of the moral ideal stands both inside amd beyond history: inside in so far as love may elicit a reciprocal response and change the character of human relations; and beyond history in so far as love cannot require a mutual response without losing its character of disinterestedness. The love commandment is therefore no simple historical possibility. The full implications of the commandment illustrate the dialectical relation between history and the eternal.[6]

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 247.

As has already been pointed out, one of the major differences between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is in their understanding of the historical possibility of the love commandment. Rauschenbusch always assumes its possibility while Niebuhr denies it. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschebbusch fails to understand the dialectical relation between history and the eternal. Niebuhr feels that liberal theologians have been too inclined to merge the eternal with the historical to the detriment of the former. This means that in their social ethics they may fail to realize how incomplete their achievements are in comparison to the divine purpose. They may also fail to realize that all historical accomplishments stand under the judgment of God and are in danger of being corrupted.

b. Laws and Principles of Justice

Niebuhr points out that "the relation of justice to love contains complexities analogous to the dialectical relation of mutual to sacrificial love."[1] Niebuhr endeavors to clarify these complexities by considering them in two dimensions:

> The first is the dimension of rules and laws of justice. The second is the dimension of structures of justice, of social and political organizations in their relation to brotherhood. The difference between the first and second dimension obviously lies in the fact that laws and principles of justice are abstractly conceived, while structures and organizations embody the vitalities of

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[1] *Ibid*.

> history. The contradictions between actual social institutions and arrangements and the ideal of brotherhood is obviously greater than between love and the rules and laws of justice.
>
> All systems, rules and laws governing social relations are on the one hand instruments of mutuality and community; and they contain on the other hand mere approximations of and positive contradictions to, the ideal of brotherhood.[1]

Niebuhr notes the possibility of "an indeterminate approximation of love in the realm of justice" because of "the positive relation of principles of justice to the ideal of brotherhood."[2] He observes that "the negative relation means that all historic conceptions of justice will embody some elements which contradict the law of love."[3] Niebhur concludes:

> The interests of a class, the viewpoint of a nation, the prejudices of an age and the illusions of a culture are consciously and unconsciously insinuated into the norms by which men regulate their common life. They are intended to give one group an advantage over another. Or if that is not their intention, it is at least the unvarying consequence.[4]

Niebuhr thus recognizes that the law of love cannot simply be written into the rules and laws of justice. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, in his zeal to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God, believes that the law of love can be largely embodied in the law of the land. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch does not adequately understand how even the best of laws tend to give one group an advantage over another. Because Rauschenbusch does not adequately understand this fact, he thinks that various social institutions can be at least partially christianized by the enactment of certain laws.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 247-248

[2] Ibid., p. 256.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

c. Structures of Justice

Niebuhr points out that if the rules and principles of justice possess an ambiguous relation to the ideal of brotherhood, "this twofold character is even more obvious and apparent in the structures and systems, the organizations and mechanisms, of society in which these principles and rules are imperfectly embodied and made historically concrete."[1] He observes that "an analysis of the equivocal character of the 'structures' of justice must include more than a mere consideration of 'civil' or 'positive' law."[2] Such an analysis must see beyond the actual laws of a nation to the whole structure and organization of historical societies. This structure is never limited to simply the order of a legal system. The concord of communities is not achieved merely by the authority of law. Niebuhr states:

> The social harmony of living communities is achieved by an interaction between the normative conceptions of morality and law and the existing and developing forces and vitalities of the community. Usually the norms of law are compromises between the rational-moral ideals of what ought to be, and the possibilities of the situation as determined by given equilibria of vital forces. The specific legal enactments are, on the one hand, the instruments of the conscience of the community, seeking to subdue the potential anarchy of forces and interests into a tolerable harmony. They are, on the other hand, merely explicit formulations of given tensions and equilibria of life and power as worked out by the unconscious interactions of social life.[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 256-257. [2] Ibid., p. 257. [3] Ibid.

Niebuhr is convinced that "no human community is . . . a simple construction of conscience or reason."[1] He believes that "all communities are more or less stable or precarious harmonies of human vital capacities."[2] Communities are governed by power. The power which makes for order and peace is not just the coercive and organizing power of government. "That is only one of the two aspects of social power."[3] The other consists in "the balance of vitalities and forces in any given social situation."[4] Niebuhr points out that "these two elements of communal life--the central organizing principle and power, and the equilibrium of power--are essential and perennial aspects of community organization."[5] There is no moral or social advance which is capable of saving society from its reliance upon these two principles.

Niebuhr notes that "each principle of communal organization--the organization of power and the balance of power--contain possibilities of contradicting the law of brotherhood."[6] There is a danger that the organizing principle and power might develop into tyranny. It may even create such a coerced unity of society that the freedom and vitality of all individual members will be impaired. When life is unified in such a way it is a travesty on brotherhood. Again, there is a danger that the principle of the balance of power may result in anarchy. Niebuhr states:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 257-258 .

[6] Ibid., p. 258.

> These twin evils, tyranny and anarchy, represent the Scylla and Charybdis between which the frail bark of social justice must sail. It is almost certain to founder upon one rock if it makes the mistake of regarding the other as the only peril.[1]

Since Rauschenbusch does not present an analysis of the structure of justice such as that of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch's social ethics does not give due consideration to the danger of anarchy or tyranny. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch's failure fully to understand the need for coercive as well as moral power in order to bring about the improvement of society, leaves the way open for anarchy. Rauschenbusch does not give sufficient consideration to the need for the organization of power and the balance of power. In his stress on socialism, Rauschenbusch fails to deal adequately with the danger of tyranny on the part of a collectivist state. Niebuhr concludes that the Christian politics of a moralistic socialism hides "the power-realities of a collectivist state behind the concept of 'cooperation' interpreted as Christian love."[2]

(1) The Unity of Vitality and Reason

Niebuhr affirms that the continual importance of power in social organization is founded upon two traits of human nature:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 229.

> The one is the unity of vitality and reason, of body and soul. The other is the force of human sin, the persistent tendency to regard ourselves as more important than any one else and to view a common problem from the standpoint of our own interest. The second characteristic is so stubborn that mere moral or rational suasion does not suffice to restrain one person from taking advantage of another. . . . The first characteristic, the unity of vitality and reason in human nature, guarantees that egoistic purposes will be pursued with all the vital resources which an individual or collective will may control. Therefore social restraints upon these anti-social purposes must be equally armed with all available resources.[1]

Niebuhr notes that "the rational calculation of the powers and vitalities, involved in a social situation, is thus an inevitable accompaniment of the rational calculation of rights and interests, involved in a socio-moral problem."[2] He concludes that "the invariable correlation of the two is a nice symbol of the unity of vitality and reason in all social existence."[3]

(2) Types of Power in Social Life

Niebuhr points out that "the spiritual and physical faculties of man are able in their unity and interrelation, to create an endless variety of types and combinations of power, from that of pure reason to that of pure physical force."[4] Reason may be just as much a weapon of the ego in pushing its claims against others as physical forces. When reason is used in such a way it becomes a "power" which favors the claims of one person against another.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II. pp. 258-259.

[2] Ibid., p. 260.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Niebuhr recognizes that all historic forms of justice and injustice are decided to a large degree "by the given equilibrium or disproportion within each type of power and by the balance of various types of power in a given community."[2] Injustice is the result of great disproportions of power. An example of this is seen in the fact that "the concentration of economic power in modern technical society has made for injustice, while the diffusion of political power has made for justice."[3]

In regard to economic power, Niebuhr points out what he considers to be an error in both liberal and Marxist social interpretations. They each identify ownership with economic power. Niebuhr affirms that "the control and manipulation of economic process is also a form of economic power."[4] He notes that economic power "gives workers minimal power resources to set against the power of ownership; and the managers of economic process are acquiring an even larger share of power."[5] According to the thought of Niebuhr, this error of identifying ownership with economic power contributes to the political miscalculations of both liberalism and Marxism. They apparently do not realize that when economic ownership is abolished such an act "may merely merge both economic and political power in the hands of an oligarchy which controls both political and economic processes."[1] Thus instead of achieving the Kingdom of God or the Marxist utopia, a new form of tyranny may be created. By pointing out this fact, Niebuhr has made a real contribution to the field of social ethics.

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 260-261. [2] _Ibid_., p. 262.

[3] _Ibid_. [4] _Ibid_. [5] _Ibid_.

In contrast to Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr holds that "no form of individual or social power exists without a modicum of physical force."[2] At the same time he does not neglect moral force which is so important to Rauschenbusch, for Niebuhr states that "no form of individual or social power exists . . . without a narrow pinnacle of 'spirit' which transcends the conflict and tension of vital forces."[3] He concludes that "the tension and balance of such forces in any given social situation include vitalities and powers which manifest the complex unity of spirit and nature, of reason and force, in the whole of human existence."[4]

(3) The Organization and Balance of Power

Niebuhr is especially concerned "with the twofold relation of . . . various forms of communal organization to the principle of brotherhood."[1] These forms of communal organization contain "both approximations and contradictions to the ideal of love."[2] This thesis is closely examined by Niebuhr "in the light of the conclusion that all social life represents a field of vitality, elaborated in many forms, which are related to each other in terms of both mutual support and of potential conflict."[3] He holds that it is "a task of conscious political contrivance in human history to mitigate conflict and to invent instruments for the enlarging mutualities of social existence."[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 264.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Niebuhr is convinced that human brotherhood is endangered by two, and perhaps three, forms of defilement:

> Will seeks to dominate will. Thus imperialism and slavery are introduced into history. Interest comes in conflict with interest and thus the relations of mutual dependence are destroyed. Sometimes the self, individual or collective, seeks to isolate itself from the community and to disavow communal responsibilities. This evil of isolationism is, however, a negative form of the evil of conflict, and therefore does not deserve a special category.[5]

Niebuhr affirms that the best way to avoid the domination of one life by another is to have "such an equilibrium of powers and vitalities. . . that weakness does not invite enslavement by the strong."[6] Unless there is "a tolerable equilibrium no moral or social restraints ever succeed completely in preventing injustices and enslavement."[1] There is a condition of tension when the will-to-power of one member of society is restrained by the counter-pressure of power by another member. All such tension is concealed or potential conflict. Thus to the degree that the principle of the equilibrium of power is able to prevent domination and enslavement, it is a principle of justice. It may become a principle of anarchy if its unresolved tensions result in overt conflict. If social life is not consciously managed and manipulated, it will not develop perfect equilibria of power. Its erratic disproportions of power produce different forms of domination and enslavement. It is therefore necessary that the various equilbria within human society be consciously controlled and manipulated. Niebuhr states:

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 265.

[2] _Ibid._

[3] _Ibid._

[4] _Ibid._

[5] _Ibid._

[6] _Ibid._

> There must be an organizing centre within a given field of social vitalities. This centre must arbitrate conflicts from a more impartial perspective than is available to any party of a given conflict; it must manage and manipulate the processes of mutual support so that the tensions inherent in them will not erupt into conflict; it must coerce submission to the social process by superior power whenever the instruments of arbitrating and composing conflict do not suffice; and finally it must seek to redress the disproportions of power by conscious shifts of the balances whenever they make for injustices.[2]

The above understanding of the organization and balance of power is a significant contribution of Niebuhr to the field of social ethics. According to him, neither idealists nor realists understand both the dangers of anarchy and tyranny, and the proper techniques for avoiding them both. Niebuhr concludes:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 265-266.

> History had to stumble by tortuous process upon the proper techniques for avoiding both anarchy and tyranny, against the illusions of idealists and of realists who understood only one or the other side of the problem. In this process the Christian tradition itself seldom stated the full truth of its twofold approach to the political order [i.e., governments as being ordained by God and as standing under His judgment] in such a way that it would give guidance in the complexities of political and social life.[1]

d. Conclusion

Niebuhr maintains the importance of recognizing the higher possibilities of justice in every historic context while at the same time recognizing that "the twin perils of tyranny and anarchy can never be completely overcome in any political achievement."[2] These perils reveal "the sinful elements of conflict and dominion" which stand "in contradiction to the ideal of brotherhood on every level of communal organization."[3] It is impossible to make history completely safe from either war or tyranny. To understand this truth "is to labor for higher justice in terms of the experience of justification by faith."[4] The meaning of justification by faith in the realm of justice is:

> that we will not regard the pressures and counter

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[1] Ibid., pp. 268-269.

[2] Ibid., p. 284.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

> pressures, the tensions, the overt and the covert conflicts by which justice is achieved and maintained, as normative in the absolute sense; but neither will we ease our conscience by seeking to escape from involvement in them. We will know that we cannot purge ourselves of the sin and guilt in which we are involved by the moral ambiguities of politics without also disavowing responsibility for the creative possibilities of justice.[1]

Niebuhr concludes his chapter on "The Kingdom of God and the Struggle for Justice" with the following challenge:

> The new world must be built by resolute men who "when hope is dead will hope by faith"; who will neither seek premature escape from the guilt of history, nor yet call the evil, which taints all their achievements, good. There is no escape from the paradoxical relation of history to the Kingdom of God. History moves toward the realization of the Kingdom but yet the judgment of God is upon every new realization.[2]

D. The Second Coming and Salvation: Eschatology

Niebuhr points out that the end of history is described in the New Testament in three fundamental symbols: "The return of Christ, the last judgment and the resurrection."[3] He affirms that these Biblical symbols must be taken seriously but not literally. When they are understood literally, "the Biblical conception of a dialectical relation between history and superhistory is imperiled; for in that case the fulfillment of history becomes merely another kind of time-history."[4] On the other hand, "if the symbols are not taken seriously the Biblical dialectic is destroyed, because in that case concepts of an eternity are connoted in which history is destroyed and not fulfilled."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 290

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 50

1. The Return of Christ

According to Niebuhr, the symbol of the Second Coming of Christ dominates the other two symbols. The judgment and the resurrection are related to the vindication of God in the Second Coming. Niebuhr points out that "to believe that the suffering Messiah will return at the end of history as a triumphant judge and redeemer is to express the faith that existence cannot ultimately defy its own norm."[2] The two most important ideas in the Christian's hope of the return of Christ are:

> that the redemption of the world does not require the destruction of creation since creation is not of itself evil, and secondly that redemption must come from God since every human action remains with the contradictions of sin.[3]

> The vindication of Christ and his triumphant return is . . . an expression of faith in the sufficiency of God's sovereignty over the world and history, and in the final supremacy of love over all the forces of self-love which defy, for the moment, the inclusive harmony of all things under the will of God.[4]

Niebuhr observes that by standng at the "end" of history the Parousia sometimes appears to be a triumph in history which will result in a redeemed temporal-historical process. But on the basis of other interpretations the redemption of history is also its culmination. This twofold aspect of the Second Coming indicates "a refutation in Biblical faith of both utopianism and a too consistent other-worldliness."[1] Niebuhr writes:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 290

[3] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 188.

[4] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 290.

> Against utopianism the Christian faith insists that the final consummation of history lies beyond the conditions of the temporal process. Against other-worldliness it asserts that the consummation fulfills rather than negates, the historical process.[2]

While Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr both agree that the ultimate fulfillment of history lies beyond history, Rauschenbusch calls for fulfillment in history as well, in the form of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus Niebuhr's criticism of utopianism applies at least in part to Rauschenbusch. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch is too optimistic in his expectation of realizing the Kingdom of God on earth. Such optimism may result in an unrealistic social ethics which will lead to despair when the goal of the Kingdom is not realized.

2. The Last Judgment

According to Niebuhr, the symbol of the last judgment in the New Testament sets forth three important aspects of the Christian conception of life and history. The first finds expression in the idea that Christ will judge history. What is meant by Christ as judge is "that when the historical confronts the eternal it is judged by its own ideal possibility, and not by the contrast between the finite and the eternal character of God."[1] The second aspect of the symbol of the last judgment is its stress upon the difference between good and evil in history. It affirms that all historic conflicts between good and evil are meaningful. The third aspect of the symbol of the last judgment is the fact that it stands at the "end" of history. There is no fulfillment of meaning within the historic process to enable man to escape the final judgment.[2] The only fulfillment possible for man must be found in God. The conclusion of the matter is:

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 290-291.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 291.

> Every effort to describe the details of fulfillment and to give plans and specifications of the heavenly city leads to absurdity.[3]
>
> It is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell; or to be too certain about any details of the Kingdom of God in which history is consummated. But it is prudent to accept the testimony of the heart, which affirms the fear of judgment.[4]

The above statement stands in contrast to Rauschenbusch's speculation about the nature of life after death. He tends toward the position which affirms the ultimate salvation of all men. From the point of view of Rauschenbusch, therefore, there is no "last" or "final judgment" except for those who are completely saved because there is always the possibility of repentance and salvation for the lost. Niebuhr, on the other hand, while refusing to speculate about the possibilities of the ultimate salvation of all men, does stress the "last judgment" which could also be interpreted as being the "final judgment." If the last judgment is final not only in the sense of being the final judgment of man's historical activities, but also in the sense of denying any future possibility of salvation in the next life, then man's historical decisions are of the utmost importance. Niebuhr apparently fears that the doctrine of universal salvation tends to play down the historical in favor of that which lies beyond history. This is certainly the last thing that Rauschenbusch desires to do, and yet according to the thought of Niebuhr, this is exactly what he is in danger of doing. Thus Rauschenbusch's own social ethics with its stress on the realization of the Kingdom of God in history is threatened by his eschatology. Niebuhr endeavors to prevent this from happening to his social ethics by stressing the finality of the last judgment.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293.

[3] Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, p. 304.

[4] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, p. 294.

3. The Resurrection

Niebuhr affirms that "there is no part of the Apostolic Creed which . . . expresses the whole genius of the Christian faith more neatly than just this despised phrase: 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.'"[1] He does not take the resurrection of the body literally. Neither does he take any other idea of fulfillment to be literally true. "All of them use symbols of our present existence to express conceptions of completion of life which transcends our present existence."[2]

Niebuhr recognizes the fact that the idea of the resurrection of the body has long since been displaced in the minds of many Christians by the concept of the immortality of the soul. The latter idea is thought of as a more reasonable expression of the hope of everlasting life. It must be admitted that "the idea of the resurrection transcends the limits of the conceivable; but it is not always appreciated that this is equally true of the idea of an immortal soul."[3]

Niebuhr prefers the hope of the resurrection of the body to the concept of the immortality of the soul "because it expresses at once a more individual and a more social idea of human existence."[4] Human life has a paradoxical relation to both nature and human history.[5] The symbol of the resurrection of the body indicates "the contribution which nature makes to human individuality and to all historical realizations."[1] Each person is a result of the social forces of human history and he attains his importance by relating himself to them. Most concepts of the future life are too individualistic. They often understand the meaning of life in such a way that a person may think of ultimate fulfillment without referring to the social process to which he belongs.[2] The logical implication of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is "that eternal significance can be ascribed only to that element in the historical synthesis which transcends finite conditions."[3] When followed to its logical conclusion this implication means that "nothing remains in eternity but an undifferentiated unity, free of all particularity and distinctions."[4]

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[1] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 290.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 294.

[4] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 297.

[5] Ibid.

On the other hand, the implication of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is "that eternal significance belongs to the whole unity of an historical realization in so far as it has brought all particularities into the harmony of the whole."[5] Consummation is thus conceived as loving fellowship with God rather than as absorption into the divine. Because such a perfect fellowship with God is not possible for man, it is dependent upon both the mercy and power of God. Thus Christian faith must trust God's mercy to contend with the recalcitrance of sin.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 296.

[2] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, pp. 297-298..

[3] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 296.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 296-297.

Although Rauschenbusch does not use the resurrection symbol because he feels that he cannot interpret it literally, he nevertheless endeavors to maintain the same truths about the future of the "saved" that Niebuhr maintains. Rauschenbusch is concerned about both individual survival and social survival in the sense that there is a real continuity between man's life in history with its social relationships and his life beyond death. He also conceives of the consummation as loving fellowship with God rather than the absorption into the divine. Rauschenbusch tends toward the idea of the immortality of the soul because he is anxious to maintain that there is something about man which literally survives death. If Rauschenbusch were living, he would probably ask Niebuhr what he means by saying that no idea of fulfillment is literally true.[2] Niebuhr would probably answer that he is just as anxious as Rauschenbusch to maintain the existence of life after death, but that no symbol whether it be that of the resurrection or the immortality of the soul can adequately express the conception of "a completion of life which transcends our present existence."[1] Niebuhr affirms the importance of maintaining a certain measure of restraint in proclaiming the Christian hope. He concludes:

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 297

[2] Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, p. 290.

> Faith must admit "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be." But it is equally important not to confuse such restraint with uncertainty about the validity of the hope that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2) The Christian hope of the consummation of life and history is less absurd than alternative doctrines which seek to comprehend and to effect the completion of life by some power or capacity inherent in man and his history. It is an integral part of the total Biblical conception of the meaning of life. Both the meaning and its fulfillment are ascribed to a centre and source beyond ourselves. We can participate in the fulfillment of the meaning only if we do not seek too proudly to appropriate the meaning as our secure possession or to effect the fulfillment by our own power.[2]

III. SUMMARY

Since Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understandings of salvation have now been presented, this writer wishes at this time to give in summary fashion the most significant facts which have been learned about their doctrines of salvation as these facts affect their social ethics. These facts will be set forth according to whether they are points of agreement or disagreement between the two men. They agree on the major premise that the Christian Gospel contains the salvation which both man and society need. They only partially agree on what the salvation is which the Christian Gospel contains.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 298.

A. Agreements

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree that Christianity should endeavor to create a conscience within society which is sensitive to its social problems. Both men oppose the use of Greek metaphysics in order to explain such difficult doctrines as that of the person of Christ. In regard to the atonement, Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each point out that it is a revelation of the love of God. Also, there is agreement on the point that if love is an essential characteristic of God, it must also be an essential characteristic of man.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each affirms man's need for repentance in order to come into right relationship with God. They believe that man receives forgiveness for his sins when in contrition he turns to God. There is agreement on the fact that when a soul thus turns from itself to God there is what Niebuhr calls a "real sanctification" which takes place in the life of the believer.[1] There are certain habits that a Christian may no longer indulge in, but most of all he comes to view life from a new perspective. Neither Rauschenbusch nor Niebuhr, however, expect the total sanctification of the individual within history.

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[1] Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 437.

While each man recognizes the value of the Church in regard to personal salvation, they each go on to affirm that the Church is not identical with the Kingdom of God as is the Roman Catholic belief. In their social ethics, neither man gives his unqualified approval to the use of physical coercion, but each recognizes its value under certain circumstances. As to eschatology, they both reject the literal meaning of the Second Coming, the last judgment, and the resurrection. At the same time they continue to maintain the Christian belief in life after death.

B. Disagreements

One of the most obvious differences between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is in their understanding of the problem of salvation. Rauschenbusch sees the problem of salvation in terms of saving finite man from the evil forces which direct him into sin. He is concerned with man's need to know and to be conscious of the presence of God, the truth about man's higher destiny, and the value of each person. By thus finding the root of sin primarily in factors subject to man's correction rather than in the spiritual nature of man, Rauschenbusch comes to expect much more in terms of both personal and social salvation within history than does Niebuhr. The latter sees the problem of salvation as being primarily "how sinful man is to be reconciled to God and how history is to overcome the tragic consequences of its 'false eternals,' its proud and premature efforts to escape finiteness."[1]

While both men agree in opposing the use of Greek metaphysics in explaining the person of Christ, Niebuhr goes on to disagree with Rauschenbusch's Christology. Niebuhr believes that such a Christology does "not proceed from a radical or profound analysis of the problem of life."[2] From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch's Christology leads to an unrealistic social ethics. This is true because if Jesus' perfection of obedience in death is largely a matter of his own attainment, then such perfection may be expected of other men and of institutions which follow the example of Jesus.

Although there are points of agreement between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr, the latter frequently draws a different conclusion from the same point of agreement. This fact is illustrated by their interpretation of the atonement. While agreeing that it is a revelation of the love of God, and that love is a vital quality in the nature of God and man, the two draw opposite conclusions as to the historical possibilities of love. Rauschenbusch concludes that it is possible to found society on love. This point is indicated by the fact that he affirms that Christ's ethic of love should be practiced not only within the Church, but also by other social institutions as well. Niebuhr, on the other hand, while acknowledging that "since . . . love is the very law of history it may have its tentative triumphs even in history,"[1] goes on to conclude that neither the Church nor the secular institutions of society can be expected to attain Christ's ideal of love. He believes that the death of love on the cross is a continual result of love. While laying greater stress on Christ's life as a whole than Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch sees Christ as involved in the struggles of history and as using his prudence to deal with them. Rauschenbusch then assumes that by following the example of Jesus man and society will so improve that the death of the Cross will not always result. With Niebuhr the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are relevant as an ideal goal, but not as an actual historical possibility. Niebuhr concludes that the best that man in society can hope for is an approximation of justice.

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 147.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 53.

A most significant difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is in their understanding of justification and sanctification. While neither man expects complete sanctification within history, Rauschenbusch does expect that in many areas of the Christian's life the contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose will be overcome. This Niebuhr denies. He believes that even the "saved" are in continual need of God's justification. Along with Martin Luther, Niebuhr affirms that the Christian is both justified and a sinner at the same time. This difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr on the question of justification and sanctification is clearly reflected in their social ethics. Since Rauschenbusch expects the contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose to be overcome in many areas of the Christian's life, he also expects the contradiction between the self-will of "christianized" social institutions and the divine purpose to be overcome in many areas of their activities. Niebuhr, on the other hand, does not expect any area of the Christian's life to be completely free from sin, and therefore is definitely convinced that it is even more false to expect a social institution to measure up to God's purpose. Neither does Niebuhr believe it possible for an institution such as a steel corporation to be "regenerated" and brought under the "law of Christ" as though it were an individual person.

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[1] Ibid., p. 49

The difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr in regard to justification and sanctification is well illustrated by their view on the Church. Rauschenbusch emphasizes the sectarian view that the church is composed of "saved" believers, and that the church should give social expression to the life derived from its founder, Jesus Christ. In fact, Rauschenbusch holds that the saving ability of the church is dependent upon its translating the personal life of Jesus into the social life of its group. Niebuhr, on the other hand, views the Church as being primarily that place in human society where God's word as both judgment and grace is proclaimed. From the point of view of Niebuhr, to make the saving ability of the Church dependent upon the ethical accomplishments of its members could only result in the weakening of the influence of the Church.

Although Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each affirm that Christians should endeavor to create a conscience within society which is sensitive to its social problems, they disagree on when physical coercion should be used to correct such problems. As has been pointed out, perhaps with the exception of the last two years of his life, Rauschenbusch tended toward the pacifist position. When he speaks of conflict, he usually means conflict in the realm of the spirit rather than physical violence. By the end of his life he had come to recognize the "value of catastrophes," but he did not live long enough to incorporate fully this insight into his social ethics. Niebuhr, on the other hand, without giving unqualified approval to physical coercion, does have a real place for it in his social ethics. He makes a detailed analysis of the struggle for justice which is not found in any of Rauschenbusch's writings. Niebuhr stresses the importance of maintaining order, freedom, equality, and justice in society. Since the ideal of love is not a simple possibility for society, he points out the need for justice and the dangers involved in attaining it. Certainly one of these dangers is that it may become necessary to use physical violence in the interest of justice. In such a case, Niebuhr would approve of the use of physical force. He makes a study of the problem of power and points out that the principle of the equilibrium of power can be a principle of justice. It may on occasion, however, become a principle of anarchy if its unresolved tensions lead to open conflict. At the same time if order is stressed to the neglect of freedom and equality there is a real danger of tyranny. According to the thought of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch's social ethics does not give due consideration to the danger of anarchy or tyranny. His failure to understand the need for the organization of power and the balance of power leaves the way open for anarchy. On the other hand, in his emphasis on socialism, Rauschenbusch does not fully realize the danger of tyranny on the part of a collectivist state.

A point of difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr in the field of economics is seen in the fact that Rauschenbusch, in agreement with Karl Marx, identifies ownership with economic power. Niebuhr disagrees with this point of view by pointing out that even if economic ownership is abolished the evils of economic power may in reality be increased by the merger of "both economic and political power in the hands of an oligarchy which controls both political and economic processes."[1] Thus instead of achieving the ideal society, a new form of tyranny may be created. By pointing out this fact, Niebuhr has corrected a serious error of Rauschenbusch and Marx, and has made a real contribution to the field of social ethics.

The disagreement between the two men on the question of what is the possible within history is clearly revealed in their understanding of the Kingdom of God. As in regard to the ethic of love, Rauschenbusch believes that the Kingdom of God is at least in part an historical possibility. With him it is not mainly futuristic. This is true even of Rauschenbusch's later writings, although in them he does not expect as immediate and as easy a realization of the Kingdom as he expected in his earlier writings written before World War I. Niebuhr does not define the Kingdom of God as does Rauschenbusch. The latter thinks of it primarily in terms of an ideal earthly social order while Niebuhr defines it primarily as being God's sovereignty over man.[2] Thus for Niebuhr it is not something which can be set up on earth by means of a series of social reforms. The Kingdom of God is an ideal which is meaningful to man as both a judgment and a goal. It will be fully realized only beyond history. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch is too optimistic in his hope of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Niebuhr believes that Rauschenbusch's understanding of the Kingdom of God threatens the dialectical relation between history and superhistory. It also results in an unrealistic social ethics which expects far more in society than is possible. While Niebuhr does not expect the earthly realization of the Kingdom of God, neither does he set a limit on the possibilities of improvements within society.

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[1] Ibid., p. 262.

[2] Ibid., p. 35

While Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr both believe in life after death as an important part of salvation, they disagree on the question of universal salvation. Rauschenbusch definitely tends toward universal salvation. Niebuhr, on the other hand, while not explicitly denying universal salvation, tends to stress the finality of the last judgment. He is anxious to maintain the importance of man's historical decisions. From the point of view of Niebuhr, Rauschenbusch's social ethics with its emphasis on the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth is endangered by his eschatology. Men who do not fear a "last judgment" are usually not as concerned about their ethics as those who realize that their historical choices are of eternal significance. Niebuhr tries to protect his social ethics from this threat by stressing the finality of the last judgment.

In this chapter Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understanding of both personal and social salvation has been presented. Special emphasis has been placed on how their interpretations of salvation have affected their social ethics. In the closing section of the chapter, the most important facts which have been learned about Rauschenbusch's and Niebuhr's understanding of salvation as these facts affect their social ethics have been summarized. In the following chapter, their ethical principles will be discussed and then illustrated by their application in various areas of social concern.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr are in agreement on the major premise that the Christian Gospel is relevant to all areas of life. They are not in agreement as to how the Christian Gospel is relevant to each particular social problem. In this chapter the social ethics of each man will be discussed and compared. Their social ethics will be illustrated by their approach to three complicated problems: the industrial economy, racial relations, and international relations. Then both the chapter and the thesis will be concluded by summarizing and evaluating what has been learned in regard to the relation between Niebuhr's social ethics and the social ethics of Rauschenbusch.

I. THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

A. Formative Influences

In order to understand Rauschenbusch's social ethics with its stress on both individual and social salvation, it is helpful to distinguish briefly five impulses which worked in his thought. These five impulses are as follows: (1) the social failures of the church, (2) the ethical teachings of Jesus and the prophets, (3) the Darwinian doctrine of evolution combined with the nineteenth century's assumption of process and progressive development, (4) the socialist movement, and (5) Rauschenbusch's Baptist heritage.

(1) A contemporary of Walter Rauschenbusch quotes him as saying that "if the Church tries to confine itself to theology and the Bible, and refuses its larger mission to humanity, its theology will gradually become mythology and its Bible a closed book."[1] This statement of Rauschenbusch vividly expresses his consciousness of the Church's failure in ministering to the social needs of man. He wisely points out that "while the Church teaches morality, it does not teach all morality with equal vigor."[2] He affirms that the Church "has in the past elaborated mainly the morals of the personal life. . . . It has not worked out in its teachings the ethics of commerce and industry."[3] This realization by Rauschenbusch of the failure of the Church in meeting such problems as those of commerce and industry prompts him to develop a Christian social ethics which does deal with them.

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[1] Ray S. Baker, "The Spiritual Unrest, A Vision of the New Christianity," The American Magazine, LXIX (December, 1909), 176.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Service of the Church to Society," The Treasury, XVII (September, 1899), 395.

(2) In the ethical teachings of Jesus and the prophets, Rauschenbusch finds inspiration for the development of his social ethics. In the Old Testament he discovers that "the Hebrew prophets had concentrated their incomparable religious energy on the simple demand for righteousness, especially in social and national life."[1] The actual life of the nation, however, never achieved the religious ideal. The unsatisfied desire of the prophets for righteousness took the form of an ardent expectation of a future day when the ideal would become a reality. This new day was spoken of as the great "day of Jehovah," which "would inaugurate a new age, the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God."[2] It is of this Kingdom that Jesus spoke. Rauschenbusch points out that "even a superficial reading of the first three Gospels shows that this was the pivot of Jesus's teaching."[3] The Kingdom of God "embodies the social ideal of the finest religious minds of a unique people."[4] The necessary thing in it is "the projection into the future of the demand for a just social order."[5] In his Sermon on the Mount, "Jesus formally outlined his conceptions of ethical

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[1] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p.57.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

and religious life. . . . It was the platform of the Kingdom of God."[1] Rauschenbusch believes that the Sermon on the Mount is applicable to both individuals and society. It is not merely an ideal goal toward which men may aim; rather, it is an actual possibility. Rauschenbusch interprets Jesus' words as follows:

> A great good was coming. It would bring a store of blessings to all who had the inward qualifications to receive them. All who felt the divine dissatisfaction with themselves and the craving for social justice and righteousness, would get their satisfaction.[2]

Such satisfaction will be received in this world.

(3) Rauschenbusch is influenced by Darwin's doctrine of evolution combined with the nineteenth century's assumption of process and progressive development. This fact is illustrated by his interpretation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. He writes:

> Jesus repeatedly and emphatically explained the coming of the Kingdom in terms taken from biological growth, and his thoughts seem to have verged away from the popular catastrophic ideas toward ideas of organic development. These changes--if we have correctly interpreted them--represent Jesus' own contribution to the history of the Kingdom ideal, and they are all in the same direction in which the modern mind has moved.[3]

Such contemporary thinkers as Niebuhr are quick to point out the weakness in such a statement as the above. From the point of view of Niebuhr, the above statement is a good example of a person interpreting Jesus in terms of nineteenth century evolutionary thought rather than in terms of the first century thought patterns of Jesus. Rauschenbusch apparently never realizes that he is forcing Jesus into the nineteenth century mold. Niebuhr tries to recognize this danger in his own understanding of Jesus.

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[1] Ibid., p. 56. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

(4) Just as Rauschenbusch reads modern evolutionary science into the teachings of Jesus, so he can see "the hands of the Almighty" in the socialist movement. He states:

> Socialism is one of the chief powers of the coming age. Its fundamental aims are righteous. . . . They were part of the mission of Christianity before the name of Socialism had been spoken. God had to raise up Socialism because the organized Church was too blind, or too slow, to realize God's ends. The Socialist parties, their technical terms, and their fighting dogmas will pass away into ancient history when their work is done. The only thing that will last and the only thing that matters is the Reign of God in humanity, and the Reign of God is vaster and higher than Socialism. The grdat danger is that our eyes will be blinded by ecclesiastical prejudices so that we do not know God when he comes close to us.[1]

(5) The fifth impulse in the development of Rauschenbusch's ethical method is that of the influence of his Baptist heritage. Baptist revivalism causes Rauschenbusch to stress the importance of individual

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 405.

conversion for a Christian society. The sectarian doctrines of the Anabaptists, with their stress on the literal application of the Sermon on the Mount, are reflected throughout Rauschenbusch's writings.[1] The Baptist doctrine of the separation of Church and State influences his social ethics. Writing in 1899, Rauschenbusch states:

> We must rid our minds of the idea that social service consists only in getting laws enacted or enforced. . . . If the influence on the political organization of the community were the only way of exerting social influence, the separation of Church and State in our country would exclude the minister from social service.[2]

The Baptist sectarian emphasis on the separation of Church and State seems to be at least partially responsible for Rauschenbusch's refusal to affiliate himself with a political party. His position in comparison to that of Niebuhr on the minister's relation to politics will be discussed in the section which deals with Rauschenbusch's view on the relation of Church and State.

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[1] For further elaboration of this point see Walter Rauschenbusch, "Critical Note on the Zurich Anabaptists and Thomas Munzer," The American Journal of Theology, IX (January, 1905), 91-106.

[2] Rauschenbusch, "The Service of the Church to Society," The Treasury, XVII, 393.

B. Ethical Principles

The two major themes which determine Rauschenbusch's social ethics are his understanding of the Kingdom of God and his treatment of sin. His concept of sin has been discussed in Chapter II. Suffice it to say here, that Rauschenbusch stresses sin as individual selfishness while at the same time recognizing its corporate aspects which include the whole of society.

The ethical goal of Walter Rauschenbusch may be summed up in the following words from the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." According to him, the Kingdom of God is an earthly possibility involving a just social order. The essence of Rauschenbusch's contribution to Social Christianity is his emphasis on religion's two great functions:

> There are two great entities in human life,--the human soul and the human race,--and religion is to save both. The soul is to seek righteousness and eternal life; the race is to seek righteousness and the kingdom of God.[1]

Because Rauschenbusch keeps both of these entities in mind, he has been accused of wavering "between a demand for a socialist society and an evangelistic appeal for a utopian Kingdom."[1] He believes that both individual men and society should be persuaded by the power of love to reform and accept voluntarily the Kingdom of God, which involves the progressive reign of love in human affairs. The Kingdom of God is not to be advanced by force. Rauschenbusch can see "its advance wherever the free will of love supersedes the use of force and legal coercion as a regulative of the social order."[2] For him, "the highest expression of love is the free surrender of what is truly our own, life, property, and rights."[3]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 367.

Rauschenbusch finds in the teachings of Jesus three fundamental social principles on which Jesus' moral imperatives are based. These principles are "the sacredness of life and personality, the solidarity of the human family, and the obligation of the strong to stand up for all whose life is impaired or whose place within humanity is denied."[4] The application of these principles furnishes the remedy for modern social evils. As men attempt to bring about the salvation of society they realize the need for constant self-sacrifice. This adds another fundamental principle to the list, namely, "the cross as a social principle."[1]

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[1] Hughley, Trends in Protestant Social Idealism, p. 9.

[2] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, pp. 142-1943.

[3] Ibid., p. 1943.

[4] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p. 190.

According to Rauschenbusch, the Church has an important task to perform in the complex structure of human society.[2] The Church must fulfill its responsibility for helping to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. The social mission of Christianity is to make the natural instinct of love "strong, durable, pure, holy, and victorious over all selfish and hateful passions."[3] Within the churches there should be more discussion on the larger, social applications of Christianity. Industrial wrongs should be debated as openly as the liquor question. Church leaders ought to inform the people of the actual social conditions and the remedies proposed for them.[4] The spirit of Christ within the Church must radiate from it as a powerful force to transform the social life of the community and nation.[5]

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 167-182.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Stake of the Church in the Social Movement," *The American Journal of Sociology*, III (July, 1897), 18.

[3] Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, p. 262.

[4] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Church and Social Questions," *Conservation of National Ideals* by D. B. Wells *et al*. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), pp. 120-121.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 103.

Rauschenbusch believes that one of the special tasks of Christians is the work of bringing together Christianity and the social movement. He desires the overhaul of all departments of Christian thought and work so that social Christianity will be "immeasurably more powerful and more valuable to the world than either an unsocial Christianity or an unchristian socialism."[1] Christians should go beyond the period of vague protest to a definite understanding of the measures that would give relief to suffering humanity. Rauschenbusch states:

> In the pulpit especially, . . . we are too often contented with mere declamation and if we were forced to put our practical proposals down in black and white, we should ourselves be surprised at the slimness of the output.[2]

Rauschenbusch holds that the Church serves society by turning men to a conscious choice of the right. He affirms that "one who bears the impulse to do right in his own heart is a source of strength and stability to the State."[3] He believes that "every real conversion is a social gain."[1] To be willing to do the right, however, is not enough. The Church must educate the conscience of those who come under its influence so that they will know what is right.[2] In regard to the relation of the Church to the social movement, Rauschenbusch writes:

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[1] Rauschenbusch, "The Ideals of Social Reformers," The American Journal of Sociology, II, 202-203.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "Proposed Cures for Social Wrongs," The Treasury, XVII (February, 1900), 768.

[3] Rauschenbusch, "The Service of Church to Society," The Treasury, XVII, 393.

> If the Church truly desires to save the social life of the people, it must be content with inspiring the social movement with religious faith and daring, and it must not attempt to control and monopolize it for its own organization.[3]

The social ethics of Rauschenbusch is influenced by his firm belief in the Baptist principle of the separation of Church and State. In discussing the relation of the Church to the State, he points out that "ideally the State is the organization of the people for their larger common interest."[4] Actually, however, "all States have been organizations of some section of the people to protect their special interests against the rest."[5] Ideally the chief task of the State should be to maintain justice. Actually the chief task of most States has been to maintain the status quo. Rauschenbusch writes that "the State is the representative of things as they are; the Church is the representative of things as they ought to be."[1] If the Church is loyal to its duty, it will "be in perpetual but friendly conflict with the State, pushing it on to ever higher lines of duty."[2] Rauschenbusch remarks:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 348.

[4] Ibid., p. 186. [5] Ibid.

> Nothing better could happen to any State than to have within it a Church devoted, not to its own selfish corporate interests, but to the moral welfare of humanity, and nudging the reluctant State along like an enlightened pedagogue.[3]

Rauschenbusch affirms that the "cooperation of the religious and politcal forces of the community furnishes the positive solution of the problem of Church and State."[4] It is the task of the Church and State both to minister "to something greater and larger than either, and they find their true relation in this unity of aim and service."[5] Rauschenbusch points out that "the machinery of Church and State must be kept separate, but the output of each must mingle with the other to make social life increasingly wholesome and normal."[6] Church and State are only partial organizations of man for specific ends. They cooperate in serving humanity. Their common goal "is to transform humanity into the kingdom of God."[1]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 186-187.

[4] Ibid., p. 380.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Rauschenbusch criticizes the involvement of a minister in a political party. He writes:

> A minister has no business to be the megaphone of a political party and its catchwords. He should rather be the master of politics by creating the issues which parties will have to espouse. . . . The time for the pulpit to do its best work is before a question is torn to tatters on the platform. A Christian preacher should have the prophetic insight which discerns and champions the right before others see it. If he has honestly done that, he can afford to be silent when the "practical men" grumblingly enter to finish up the job which he has helped to lay out for them. . . . The early work is the formative work. Embodying a moral conviction in law is the last stage of a moral propaganda. Laws do not create moral convictions; they merely recognize and enforce them.[2]

Rauschenbusch endeavored to live up to the above ideals involving the minister's relationship to politics, but in practice did not always succeed in doing so. He did try his best to create "the issues which parties will have to espouse" and to make his own convictions known on these issues by personally talking with such political leaders as Theodore Roosevelt. As for the embodying of a moral conviction into law, he was largely content to let the law makers work out the exact details of a reform bill. He would, however, encourage Christian groups to support such a bill. Rauschenbusch avoided official membership in any political party including the Socialist. Many of his personal convictions, though, were in closer harmony with the Socialist Party than with either the Democrats or Republicans. His belief in socialism was of course well known, and therefore he did, though not as an official party spokesman, aid the cause of socialism.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

Rauschenbusch makes at least one exception to his rule that a minister should not publicly espouse a particular political party. He points out that "it may happen at long intervals in the history of a nation that a political party so thoroughly embodies the righteous instincts of the nation that its cause is almost identified with the triumph of justice." He goes on to note that "in such a juncture a minister may wisely decide that he must throw his influence publicly with that party and risk a loss of influence in other directions."[1] Certainly Niebuhr has taken this chance, but in his present espousal of the Democratic Party he would be the last to agree that its cause is "almost identified with the triumph of justice."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 362.

[2] During the early Roosevelt era Niebuhr was in no sense a supporter of the Democratic Party, but as a Socialist was its ardent critic.

It is his conviction, however, that the Democratic Party may bring about greater justice in society than either the Republican or the Socialist. He is of the belief that a minister should unite with a political party even though it may be only slightly more "righteous" than other parties if it is the one which is most likely to bring about needed political and economic reforms. Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch on the importance of the minister helping to create moral convictions. He also agrees with Rauschenbusch's encouragement of Christian groups to support reform measures in Congress.

C. Areas of Social Concern

Since the ethical principles of Rauschenbusch have been presented, it is important now to see how he deals with individual social problems. His position concerning the following three subjects will be discussed: the industrial economy, racial relations, and international relations.

1. The Industrial Economy

Rauschenbusch calls for the christianizing of the social order. By christianizing the social order he means "bringing it into harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ."[1] He recognizes, however, that in using such a word there is a danger of expecting too much. He notes that "even a Christian social order cannot mean perfection."[2] This is true because "as long as men are flesh and blood the world can be neither sinless nor painless."[3] Rauschenbusch realistically affirms that we shall never expect to get perfection, "but by demanding it we shall get more than we now have."[4] He holds that "within the limitations of human nature . . . the constitutional struction of the social order can be squared with the demands of Christian morality."[5]

According to Rauschenbusch, four great sections of our social order have already been christianized--"the family, the organized religious life, the institutions of education, and the political organization of our nation."[6] By this he means that they "have passed through constitutional changes which have made them to some degree part of the organism through which the spirit of Christ can do its work in humanity."[7]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 125.

[2] Ibid., p. 126.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 127.

[6] Ibid., p. 154.

[7] Ibid.

Since the larger part of christianizing the social order has already been accomplished, now only business remains to be christianized. "Business life is the unregenerate section of our social order."[1] Rauschenbusch feels that the first need is to analyze the economic system in order to find out wherein and why it is basically unchristian. The tests that he applies to business are not technical but moral. He asks:

> Does our business system create sound and noble manhood? Does it make it fairly easy to do right and hard to do wrong? Does it call men upward or tempt them downward? Does it reward or penalize fraternal action? Does it furnish the material basis for the Reign of God on earth?[2]

Rauschenbusch thinks that as long as the economic order is merely the perfecting of human association, Christianity cannot argue with it. He writes:

> The massing of industrial units, the specializing of functions, the mastery of natural forces by science and technical skill, are henceforth part and parcel of every social order that will develop on this planet unless the race reverts to barbarism. . . . An enlarged and diversified industrial organization is not an evil, but a good.
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> The moral objection lies, not against the size and complexity of the modern system, but against the fact that this wonderful product of human ability and toil with its immense powers of production has gravitated into the ownership and control of a relatively small class of men.[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 155-156. [2] Ibid., pp. 157-158.

[3] Ibid., p. 163.

According to the thought of Walter Rauschenbusch, civilization has reached the point where power should shift from the ruling class to the workers in industry. He proclaims the need for industrial democracy. There exists the necessity for a "thoroughgoing change in the relation between the two great economic classes."[1] Christianity should enter into a working agreement with the rising class of labor. The Church should use its influence to secure the victory of the principles of socialism by the "gradual equalization of social opportunity and power."[2] There must be the creation of new forms of association. America's disorganized competitive life must change into an organic cooperative life.[3]

Rauschenbusch calls "the slow conflict of opposing forces . . . God's method of educating a nation."[4] His theory of peaceful industrial conflict is well summed up in the following words:

> In the peaceful conflict crude schemes are melted

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[2] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, p. 414.

[3] Rauschenbusch, "The Ideals of Social Reformers," *The American Journal of Sociology*, II, 209-210.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

> down and refined; ideas are elaborated; the public mind is permeated; old fogies die; a young generation grows up with the new ideals bred in their bones; and when the change comes, it has a backing in the people. While if it were forced on an indifferent or hostile majority by a determined minority, there would be a reaction, a repeal, and a great and wise measure would go down to the record of posterity discredited and abolished after trial. . . . Steady progress, measure by measure, is best, feeling our way from step to step with sure-footed Anglo-Saxon caution, keeping our feet on the ground, and not going off in a French balloon of abstract principles and logical schemes.[1]

Until such time as socialism becomes a reality in America, Rauschenbusch suggests the following proposals:

> The appropriation of the unearned increment in land by a tax on land values; stability of the currency, implying steady increase without inflation; a progressive inheritance tax, the completer organization of labor, and the protection of labor, especially of women and children, against excessive hours, unsanitary conditions, and unnecessary danger.[2]

All of the above material on the industrial economy was written by Rauschenbusch before the outbreak of World War I, which had such a tremendous effect on his thought. It has been pointed out in Chapter III how the war affected his thinking on the value of physical coercion. It is the opinion of this writer that the war also affected his thought on the extent of the christianizing of the social order. It is doubtful that at the time of Rauschenbusch's death he could still say that "the largest and hardest part of the christianizing of the social order has been done."[1] The war visibly affected his optimism, and caused him to realize that the christianization of society had not progressed nearly as far as he had thought. Since, however, he never believed that the industrial economy had been christianized, what he wrote in regard to it, including his belief in the need for socialism, he still affirmed at his death.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

[2] Walter Rauschenbusch, "Practical Cures for Social Wrongs Under Individualism," *The Treasury*, XVII (April, 1900), 934.

In Rauschenbusch's suggestion that moral tests should be applied to the business world is seen a foreshadowing of Niebuhr's method of studying the facts of an industrial society in the light of the Christian faith. Niebuhr, too, applies the moral tests of the Christian ethic to the business world, but in addition he makes a more extensive analysis of the technical problems of a modern economy than does Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr's position in regard to the industrial economy will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. In the meantime, Rauschenbusch's understanding of two other important issues will be presented--that of racial relations and international relations.

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[1] Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 124. (cf., pp. 14-15 above.)

2. Racial Relations

Speaking on the race issue before the American Missionary Association in 1912, Rauschenbusch said: "For years the problem of the two races in the South has seemed to be so tragic, so insoluble, that I have never ventured to discuss it in public."[1] Dores Sharpe points out that perhaps one reason that this problem seemed so insoluble to him was the fact of his unfamiliarity with it. The great migration of Negroes from the South to the industrial centers of the North had only scarcely begun during his lifetime. He was not, therefore, directly faced with the problem to the extent to which Niebuhr is today. Rauschenbusch states:

> We, of the North, have come to realize that the problem of the black man was solved fifty years ago in anger and bitterness and, therefore, solved very poorly. We realize that we cannot solve it for the South. But no solution by southern men can be permanent which does not satisfy the Christian consciousness of the whole

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[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Belated Race and the Social Problem." (Address before the American Missionary Association, 1912.) This address is quoted in Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, p. 166.

> nation. And no solution will satisfy the Christian spirit of our united nation which does not provide for the progressive awakening of hope and self-respect in the individual Negro and the awakening of race pride and race ambition in all Negro communities. . . .
>
> . . . However great the practical difficulties may be, the Christian way out is to take our belated black brother by the hand and urge him along the road of steady and intelligent labor, of property rights, of family fidelity, of hope and self-confidence, and of pride and joy in his race achievements, and this work can best be done when North and South join hands in going it, not ostracizing, but aiding and honoring every one who puts his life alongside of that of the Negro in the spirit of him who never broke the bruised reed or quenched the feeble light of hope, but brought the evangel of freedom and human worth to the poor and backward, and worked miracles through them.[1]

3. International Relations

Facing the problem of international relations, Rauschenbusch points out that only two forces are making for international fellowship with somewhat unselfish motives--the social movement and foreign missions.[2] He highly approves of the work of the foreign mission societies in this regard,[3] but has some doubts about certain tendencies of social reformers which he considers as dangerous to national life. Writing in 1896, he opposes their inclinations to international union, and speaks of nationality as "a good and holy fact." He states:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 166-167.

[2] Rauschenbusch, "The Ideals of Social Reformers," The American Journal of Sociology, II, 208.

[3] Ibid.

> The internationalism of the working classes is nobly right in protesting against a narrow and warlike patriotism, but we must never lose our loyalty to our own country, nor our reverence for her past, her heroes, and her flag. As the new social enthusiasm must contain in itself the old love of family, so the new love of humanity must contain the old love of the fatherland.[1]

Rauschenbusch insists on the christianizing of international relations. In 1917 he writes:

> The demand for disarmament and permanent peace, for the rights of the small nations against the imperialistic and colonizing powers, for freedom of the seas and of trade routes, for orderly settlement of grievances,--these are demands for social righteousness and fraternity on the largest scale.[2]

Following the outbreak of World War I, Rauschenbusch calls for the translation of the Social Gospel into international terms. He sees the cause of the war in "the same lust for easy and unearned gain which has created the internal social evils under which every nation has suffered."[3] According to him, "the social problem and the war problem are fundamentally one problem, and the Social Gospel faces both."[4] The problem of international peace is fundamentally "the problem of expanding the area of love and social unity."[1] Rauschenbusch believes "it is the sin of Christendom that so few took this problem seriously until we were chastised for our moral stupidity and inertia."[2] He prophesied that the young men and women of his day would "have to take this problem on their intellect and conscience for their lifetime, and propose to see it through."[3] Little did he realize how well one of those young men, Reinhold Niebuhr, would fulfill this prophecy. Neibuhr's ethical principles along with some of their practical applications will now be studied.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

[2] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 4.

[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

II. THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR

A. Formative Influences

Waldo Beach points out that "Reinhold Niebuhr . . . typifies a mixture of traditions."[4] This fact is clearly revealed in his ethical system and in the application of its principles to a variety of social and political problems. Beach notes that Niebuhr

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[1] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p. 26.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr (eds.), Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1955), p. 482.

"has remained in part a child of the Social Gospel, though indeed a rebellious child, and heir to the prophetic and social passion of Rasuchenbusch."[1] As a pastor in Detroit during the 1920's, Niebuhr discovered the inadequacy of the optimistic message of the Social Gospel to meet the needs of a tragic and rapidly changing world. He was particularly impressed by the disparity between "moral man and immoral society." As an individual, man appeared to act better than he did as a part of a group. Niebuhr found some explanation for this in the Marxist analysis of society. Gradually, however, he found the Marxist analysis less helpful than the traditional theological understanding which points out the essential difficulty in the heart of man. The trouble with man is his "unbelief" which results in his rebellion against God and in man's effort to make himself the center of the universe. The European theologians, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, with their emphasis on the Pauline-Augustinian description of the human predicament, helped Niebuhr to find the clue to the understanding of human events. In his many books and articles, Niebuhr has empirically illustrated his understanding of the classical view of man. He has done it in the fields of history, politics, and economics.[1]

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[1] Ibid.

B. Ethical Principles

In this section Niebuhr's most mature ethical thinking will be presented.[2] One of the best and most recent sources of information on his social ethics is his article entitled "Christian Faith and Social Action" which is found in the symposium by the same title edited by John A. Hutchison. This article will frequently be used to substantiate the material set forth here on Niebuhr's ethical principles. The central motif around which this material will be centered is that of pointing out in what way Niebuhr's social ethics is Christian and in what way it is pragmatic. By Christian is meant the ideal of self-giving love as it was set forth by Christ, particularly in his death on the cross. By pragmatic is meant the non-absoluteness of all social programs.

The heart of Niebuhr's social ethics is the fact that he insists on the necessity of discovering "proximate" Christian solutions to the ultimately insoluble problem of christianizing civilization. According to Niebuhr's thought, "Christianity must learn to make its contribution to the achievement of the very relative justice which is possible in the political sphere without losing sight of the relative character of every such achievement."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 482-483.

[2] Niebuhr's books and articles which are earlier than his Gifford Lectures will be referred to only when reference is made to statements within them which are in agreement with his most mature thought.

Niebuhr believes that a true Christian has only two choices of ethical method. The one is asceticism, which he rejects because in adhering to it the good man becomes a parasite on the sinful world. The other is to participate to the best of one's ability in the relative programs of politics for the achievement of a relative justice. Such participation, however, "will always be qualified by the realization that in every social conflict there are demonic forces on both sides and that the choice is one between evils as well as between goods."[2]

In Niebuhr's social ethics he endeavors to maintain a relationship between the pragmatic and the Christian. The Christian side of his social ethics is revealed in his affirmation that "Christians must make their decisions about political and economic alternatives with a sense of responsibility to the divine will as revealed in Christ."[1] Then he goes on to point out, however, that "the question is whether there are any criteria whereby we can judge between alternative movements."[2] Niebuhr writes:

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Leaves from the Notebook of a War-Bound American," The Christian Century, LVI (November 15, 1939), 1405.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Comment on 'The Christian Cult of Violence,' an article by Jerome Davis," Religion in Life, III (Summer, 1934), 441.

> The love which is the final criteria is obviously a principle of criticism upon all political and economic realities, since it reveals the sinful element of self-seeking and of coercive restraint in all forms of human community. But does it help us to arrive at discriminate choices between alternative systems since all of them have morally ambiguous elements in them? In the field of economic life, self-seeking, about which one must have an ultimate scruple, must be immediately used and harnessed for proximate purposes. In the field of politics, power which may be provisionally useful in establishing tolerable harmonies of life may become, if unrestrained, the instrument of tyranny and oppression.[3]

Niebuhr notes that "since there is moral ambiguity in every possible political and economic position . . . it sould seem that the first duty of Christian faith is to preserve a certain distance between the sanctities of faith and the ambiguities of politics."[4] In other words, the Christian in politics must have no specific "Christian politics."

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[1] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 228.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

[4] Ibid., p. 229.

Niebuhr is critical of Christian politics which are "based upon concepts of justice derived from an eternal natural law."[1] He points out that such politics "have been a source of error because relative historical judgments, prompted by interest and passion have been insinuated into the sanctity of eternal law."[2]

Neibuhr's position on natural law is indicated by the following statement:

> There must be some way of resolving this debate between legalists and relativists which will refute the legalists whenever they make too sweeping claims for fixed standards of conduct and which will, at the same time, avoid the abyss of nihilism on the edge of moral relativism. Could the "word of the Cross" be the resolution of that debate? Could the law of love, which is more than law, illumine the limits of law in prescribing rules for human freedom? Could the law of love, which rises above all specific law, refute the claims of relativists who recognize the limits of law but not the peril of lawlessness?[3]

While thus stressing the law of love as the protection against moral relativism, Niebuhr goes on to recognize that there is some truth in the concept of natural law. He believes that there is "a permanent structure of human personality,"[4] and that there are ethical principles which men may become aware of without special revelation. In regard to the latter point, Niebuhr states: "Karl Barth's belief that the moral life of man would possess no valid principles of guidance, if the Ten Commandments had not introduced such principles by revelation, is as absurd as it is unscriptural."[1] Niebuhr affirms that the rules of natural law "are not absolute but relative."[2] He concludes:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 173.

[4] Ibid., p. 180.

> They are applications of the law of love and do not have independence apart from it. They would be independent only if they were founded in an "essential" social structure. If the illusions of classical rationalism are dispelled, it will be seen that it is not possible to define an essential structure of community except the law of love.[3]

Niebuhr finds that the Christian politics of Protestant individualism are more unsatisfactory than the Catholic politics based on natural law. This is true because Protestant individualism "regarded the competitive struggle in a modern bourgeois-capitalistic society as a simple instrument of justice and obscured the disproportions of power and resulting injustices in the system."[1] Niebuhr points out, on the other hand, that the Christian politics of a moralistic socialism hides "the power-realities of a collectivist state behind the concept of 'cooperation' interpreted as Christian love."[2] Niebuhr writes:

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 254.

[2] Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 435.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 435-436.

> In every case religious sanctities confused rather than clarified the picture. Sometimes they are the screen for particular interests, as, for instance, when a feudal nobility or a modern business oligarchy appeal to the eternal standards of natural law or natural rights to justify their power and privilege. Sometimes they are meant to hide the tension between the purity of the ultimate and the complexity of the immediate situation, as, for instance, when a coercive political arrangement is pictured as an embodiment of the principle of love.[3]

Rauschenbusch does not deal explicitly with natural law in his social ethics because of his belief in the applicability of the law of love to all social problems. He would recognize, however, that man is not wholly ignorant of right and wrong apart from a knowledge of the ethics of Jesus. This means that there is an implied natural law in Rauschenbusch's thought, but since he has the law of love he does not stress the importance of natural law. Apparently he agrees with Niebuhr that Roman Catholic thought tends to make natural law absolute instead of Christ's standard of agape. From the point of view of Rauschenbusch, natural law may aid in reaching ethical agreement with those who do not know the law of love. But he prefers to emphasize Christ's ideal for those individuals and groups who have been under the influence of the Christian tradition. Thus he and Niebuhr each oppose the Catholic doctrine of natural law. As has already been noted, however, Niebuhr does not believe that the law of love is as much of an historical possibility as Rauschenbusch affirms it to be.

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[1] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 229.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Niebuhr's exclusion of the religious element from pragmatic decisions is seen by him as being "only a negative determinant of a Christian approach to the economic and political order."[1] He then turns from the negative to inquire how a positive answer is to be found to economic and political problems.

Niebuhr points out that "the basic presuppositions of a positive answer must lie in a Christian understanding of the realities of man's social life."[2] These realities must not be interpreted in purely idealistic terms. One must "recognize an admixture of self-seeking in every form of human togetherness and also in every strategy of government required to prevent competitive self-seeking from degenerating into anarchy."[1] Niebuhr affirms that an attitude which escapes both sentimentality and cynicism must have a thorough understanding of the Christian doctrine of man which takes into consideration both man's selfish pride and his capacity for justice.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 229-230.

Niebuhr holds that "if this be the general attitude of circumspection it follows that no political decision can be reached in terms of merely broad principles, whether of 'freedom' or 'justice' or 'planning.'"[3] Society is injured by general programs which act as instruments of warring groups and classes. Niebuhr suggests the following two reasons why evil proceeds from such inclusive and abstract programs:

> 1) These generalizations fail to take the endless contingencies of history into account.
> 2) General programs and panaceas are stubbornly held and not easily amended by empirical data for two reasons: (a) They tend to be a screen for particular interests in society and as their weapons in social controversy. . . . (b) Panaceas do not, however, merely hide special economic or social interests. They may have another purpose which is of particular concern for students of morals and religion. They tend to obscure the tension between individual and social morality.[4]

According to Niebuhr, "the rational, moral and religious defects of general political and social and economic programs, does not justify the conclusion that no moral choice between general programs is possible and that only pragmatic approaches to detailed problems of justice are legitimate."[1] One must make general decisions at certain points in history. Niebuhr notes that "it was, for instance, morally right as well as historically inevitable that the rising middle classes should have challenged the organic cohesions and the traditional authorities of monarchial absolutism in the early part of the modern period."[2] Today it is just as right and inevitable that men should support programs for state control of economic power and that they should desire certain minimal welfare goals in housing, social security, and education. Niebuhr believes that the fact of the necessity "to shift from the emphasis upon liberty to the emphasis upon mutual responsibility and political restraint upon economic power, proves the historical relativity of all socio-moral choices."[3] The shift in emphasis became necessary because of the failure of justice to proceed as inevitably from freedom as the earlier bourgeois creed supposed.

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[1] Ibid., p. 230.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 231.

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[1] Ibid., p. 232. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 232-233.

Niebuhr affirms that it is thus clear that men must decide between competing systems and political philosophies, but these decisions must "be constantly reviewed empirically and amended in the light of new evidence."[1] The Christian faith has nothing directly to do with some of the resources for these procedures. Such resources belong to an inductive instead of a deductive social science. This type of science does not speak vaguely about general concepts of property or planning. Niebuhr affirms that "it will not assume that all government interference in economic process is either good or bad; but it will study the effect of each type of interference."[2]

While Niebuhr thus emphasizes the pragmatic in his social ethics, he nevertheless does not fail to stress the Christian. He consistently endeavors to maintain a vital relationship between the pragmatic and the Christian. He writes:

> The real fact is that a religious problem underlies this persistence with which general ideals, laws and systems are used either as weapons of special interest or as efforts to hide the hiatus between the demands of a sensitive conscience and the morally ambiguous realities of man's social life. There can, therefore, be no genuine empiricism without a religious correction of this tendency.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 233.

[2] Ibid., pp. 233-234.

[3] Ibid., pp. 234-235.

Niebuhr is critical of Barth because Barth fails to maintain a vital relationship between the pragmatic and the Christian. According to Niebuhr, one of the major defects "in Barth's theological approach to political and moral problems is his extreme pragmatism, which disavows all moral principles."[1] Niebuhr affirms that "without the guidance of principles and looking at every event afresh in the light of the Word of God, Barth comes to the capricious conclusion that communism is not as bad as nazism because it is not anti-Semitic."[2] Niebuhr is convinced that "looking at every event afresh means that one is ignorant about the instructive, though inexact, analogies of history which the 'godless' scientists point out for our benefit."[3] He calls attention to the fact that "a Catholic theologian has defined the Barthian approach to the political order as 'designed for the church of the catacombs.'"[4] Niebuhr believes that "the description is accurate: Barth's view makes no provision for discriminating judgments, both because of its strong eschatological emphasis and because of the absence of principles and structures of value."[1]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why Is Barth Silent on Hungary?" The Christian Century, LXXIV (January 23, 1957), 109.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid

Niebuhr points out that a genuine and vital Christian faith is relevant to the solution of social issues because "it unmasks the errors of a false and abstract idealism by two forces, one neative and one positive."[2]

(1) According to Niebuhr, "the negative force is the contrite recognition in the Christian faith, as expounded in the New Testament, that the law is not redemptive but may be the servant of sin."[3] He observes that this recognition is found in the Christian understanding of the perseverance of sin in the life of man. Sin is found not only in the acts of individual men, but also in the deeds of such groups as the family, the race, the class, and the nation. Niebuhr states:

> The real problem of a Christian social ethic is to derive from the Gospel a clear view of the realities with which we must deal in our common or social life, and also to preserve a sense of responsibility for achieving the highest measure of order, freedom and justice despite the haxards of man's collective life.[4]

(2) Niebuhr points out that the positive force

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," *Christian Faith and Social Action*, p. 235.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

which unmasks the mistakes of a false and abstract idealism is "the application of the law of love to man's collective relations."[1] The entire question of the possibility of a Christian social ethic is found in the problem of applying the law of love to the corporate relationships of man.[2] For Niebuhr the law of love is an "impossible possibility."[3] It is possible because the "heights of pure love are organically related to the experience of love in all human life."[4] It is impossible because man "is . . . and will remain, a creature of finiteness."[5] Niebuhr then raises the question of "how, if love is not a simple possibility, it may yet be relevant to our political decisions."[6] He points out that "this question really involves the relevance of our final Christian insights as individuals to our actions as members of a group."[7] As individuals love is realized as the final law of life, but in political action we participate as members of the group. If life is viewed from the standpoint of the revelation of Christ, "we can see the self-destructive character of every form of self-seeking and the redemptive possibility of minding not our own things but those of another (I Corinthians 10:24)."[1] This means that it is possible both to condemn and to guard against national selfishness and all forms of collective pride even when it is realized that they cannot be destroyed. It is also possible to guard against the perversion of individual self-interest in the establishment of social institutions although it is not expected to be excluded. The law of love is thus understood not as something extra that is tacked on to whatever morality is established in our social relations, but as their guiding principle.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 237. [2] Ibid.

[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1935), p. 118.

[4] Ibid., p. 31.

[5] Ibid., p. 118. According to his later thought, Niebuhr would state that man remains a creature of sin.

[6] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 237.

[7] Ibid.

Niebuhr notes that "in one sense, the applicability of the law of love to the complex problem of social ethics could be defined as the question how the heedlessness of perfect love can be related to the discriminate judgments which are required to weigh competing values and interests in the field of social relations."[3] Perfect love is understood as sacrificial love which refuses to make prudent calculations between one's own interests and those of others. Perfect justice does discriminate and calculate in order to measure the limits of interests and the connection between one's own interests and those of others. The spirit of justice is especially forwarded "if reason finds the points of coincidence between the interests of the self and those of the other."[1] If not, the spirit of justice is forwarded by making careful and discriminate judgments between them. Niebuhr asks: "What can this heedlessness of Agape have to do with discrimination?"[2] He answers this question as follows:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 237-238.

[3] Ibid., p. 239.

> It would have nothing to do at all, if there were such a thing as pure reason, which could arbitrate between interests, and if there were recurring patterns of life so analogous as to reveal structures of justice which reason could discern. Actually, the human situation lacks both of these elements upon which rationalistic ethical judgments depend so much. The reason with which we reason about each other's affairs and interests is not "pure" reason and it cannot be made "objective and impartial" by any rational discipline or scientific method. The self, whether individual or collective, is too deeply involved in its processes.[3]

Man's reason does not guarantee justice. The possibility of justice exists only in the self, if it is not too certain of itself. The heedlessness of sacrificial love participates in the calculations of justice as the spirit of contrition which results from the self's confrontation with God. In that encounter the self is made to realize "the contingent character of all human claims and the tainted character of all human pretensions and ideals."[1] In such contrition is found the socially pertinent counterpart of love. Niebuhr states:

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

> It breaks the pride of the implacable contestants and competitors in all human encounters and persuades them to be "kindly affectioned one with another, forgiving one another, even also as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). . . . Thus the Agape of forgiveness as well as the Agape of sacrificial love become a leaven in the lump of the spirit of justice. Or rather it would be better to use the other Gospel symbol and define them as the "salt" which arrests the decay in the spirit of justice.[2]

As has already been discussed in Chapter III of this thesis,[3] Niebuhr makes a detailed analysis of the struggle for justice in the second volume of his Gifford Lectures. He emphasizes the value of maintaining order, freedom, equality and justice in society. Niebuhr's analysis of the struggle for justice furnishes the theoretical basis of his pragmatic, individual case approach to social problems. This approach is different from that of Rauschenbusch in that he does not make such an analysis of the power factors in the struggle for justice as is made by Niebuhr.

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[1] Ibid., p. 240. [2] Ibid.

[3] See pp. 81-95 of Chapter III for this discussion.

According to the thought of Niebuhr, since Rauschenbusch tries to apply the standard of agape directly to society, he does not possess a conception of the Christian faith which makes it sufficiently relevant to the solution of social issues. Niebuhr, on the other hand, holds that his conception of the Christian faith does make it sufficiently relevant to the solution of social issues. Because his conception of the Christian faith is sufficiently relevant, Niebuhr believes that he has been more successful in dealing with social questions than was Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr writes:

> To know both the law of love as the final standard and the law of self-love as a persistent force is to enable Christians to have a foundation for a pragmatic ethic in which power and self-interest are used, beguiled, harnessed and deflected for the ultimate end of establishing the highest and most inclusive community of justice and order. This is the very heart of the problem of Christian politics: the readiness to use power and interest in the service of an end dictated by love and yet an absence of complacency about the evil inherent in them. No definitions or structures of justice can prevent these forces from getting out of hand if they are not handled with a sense of their peril.[1]

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[1] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 241.

Niebuhr is alert to the fact that frequently Christians become self-satisfied and isolated in the area of personal relations and fail to shed any light on or to make any creative contribution to either the political or economic problems of life. Liberal Christians often tend to over-estimate "the moral possibilities of man's collective life while the more orthodox . . . are usually overcome by a pessimistic overemphasis on the evils in collective life, thus consigning it to the devil."[1] Niebuhr states:

> The task of any movement devoted to "social Christianity" must be, therefore, not so much to advocate a particular nostrum for the solution of various economic and social evils, but to bring a full testimony of a gospel of judgment and grace to bear upon all of human life: Upon the individual in the final heights of individual self-consciousness, where it transcends all social institutions and historic situations, and upon human communities which do, on their own level, make contact with the kingdom of God, wherever individuals recognize that judgment and mercy of God are relevant to their collective as well as to their individual actions, and to the actions by which they order their common life as well as to actions in which they express themselves above and beyond every particular order or system.[2]

Speaking in 1948 before the World Council of Churches' First General Assembly, Niebuhr stated that "the Christian Church must bear witness against every form of pride and vainglory, whether in the secular or in the Christian culture."[1] It is the positive task of the Church to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Christ to both nations and individuals. Niebuhr elaborated on the responsibility of the Church as follows:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

[2] *Ibid.*

> Our business is so to mediate the divine judgment and grace that nations, classes, states and cultures, as well as individuals, may discern the divine author of their wounds, that they may also know the possibility of a new and whole life. In a day of complacency and security the Christian Church must anticipate the judgment which is to come and declare that the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light. In the day of judgment and catastrophe the Christian Gospel has a message of hope for those who truly repent.[2]
>
> If the slogan that the Church should be the Church is to have a meaning other than its withdrawal from the world, must it not mean that by prayer and fasting it has at least extricated itself in some degree from its embarrassing alliance with this or that class, race and nation so that it may speak the word of God more purely and more forthrightly to each man and nation, but also to each generation according to the peculiar needs of the person and the hour?[3]

The above quotation brings to the forefront the principle of the separation of Church and State. While agreeing with Rauschenbusch in affirming this principle, Niebuhr does not interpret it to mean that a minister should not become an active member of a political party. Neither does he believe that the problem of the relation of Church and State has been solved by the conception of a free Church in a free State. According to Niebuhr, "no particular formula can solve this problem."[1] He points out that the lack of conflict between Church and State in America is due fundamentally not to this formula, but rather to the fact that neither Church nor State has been sufficiently developed or defined. In the meantime "the American State is developing and increasing its powers and the Church must gradually recognize that it is something more than the community at prayer."[2] Niebuhr affirms that "the church is the body of Christ," and that "such fellowship can never be completely at home in any nation or perfectly conform to national purposes and ambitions."[3]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems, p. 111.

[2] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

[3] Ibid., p. 114.

Niebuhr is critical of those "prophets of God who imagine that Christianity and the religion 'of the American dream' are one and the same thing."[4] He writes:

> These prophets imagine that 'democracy is the social and political expression of Christianity,' and that a nation which has abolished kings has also overcome the pride of nations. They do not know what a proud, vexatious and cruel king Demos may become on occasion.[5]

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[1] Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 84.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 85

[5] Ibid.

This criticism by Niebuhr might well have been directed against the earlier writings of Rauschenbusch in which the latter expressed his belief in the christianization of politics. By the time of his death, however, Rauschenbusch had come to learn how cruel "king Demos may become on occasion." He did not live long enough to articulate fully this truth as has Niebuhr.

Throughout this discussion of the ethical principles of Niebuhr it has been seen how he endeavors to maintain the relationship between the pragmatic and the Christian in his social ethics. While emphasizing the non-absoluteness of all social programs, he proceeds to study each social program and each social problem in the light of the Christian Gospel. This ethical approach of Niebuhr will now be illustrated in the following areas of social concern: the industrial economy, racial relations, and international relations.

C. Areas of Social Concern

1. The Industrial Economy

Niebuhr's pragmatic ethical method is vividly illustrated by his writings in the field of economics. His earlier writings, particularly during the 1930's, reflect the point of view of Christian socialism which was based upon a general acceptance of the Marxist view of historical determinism and of social strategy. His more recent writings, particularly since the end of World War II, indicate that he has made the transition from Christian socialism to the acceptance of a mixed economy. Actually this transition began in the thirties when he broke with socialism as a system and accepted the New Deal and then later the Fair Deal as the pattern of a creative revolution in America. In 1949 Niebuhr visited in England where he had the opportunity of observing the practice of socialism on a limited scale. There he became clearly aware of the problems of incentive and bureaucracy under socialism. This pragmatic experience with socialism convinced him of the value of a mixed economy. Now he emphasizes the distribution of economic power instead of socialistic planning.[1] Niebuhr is thus opposed to "abstract modes of social engineering."[2]

According to Niebuhr, within Western society there has been "virtual civil war between the middle-class proponents of free economy and the proletarian proponents of a collectivist one."[1] There is in each creed a mixture of truth and error. The liberal creed is wrong in assuming that property is simply the servant of justice, and the Marxist creed is wrong in assuming that property is the basis of all evil. Niebuhr points out that "the power of the state is not as dangerous as the liberal creed imagines and not as beneficent as collectivist theory assumes."[2] As the libertarian creed failed to foresee the disproportions of power in modern industrial society, so the collectivist creeds failed to foresee the moral dangers in a system which combined political and economic power in one oligarchy. The collectivist creed also failed to furnish adequate local initiative in both the economic and political life of society.

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[1] John C. Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," Reinhold Niebuhr, pp. 71-76.

[2] Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems, p. 72.

In applying his ethical principles to economic problems, Niebuhr deals with each case individually. He points out that the institution of property in an agrarian situation is different from that in an industrial situation. The relation of a peasant "to the soil is of a different order than the relation of either an owner or a worker to a factory."[1] One should study the effects of the socialization of property. Thus he "will probably conclude that there were important economic as well as social reasons for Britain's socialization of coal which do not necessarily justify the plan for socializing steel."[2] By studying social conditions a person may see the necessity of caring for human welfare in areas where a market economy does not meet human needs. Examples of this are found in housing and medical services. No one, however, should "assume that human desires are naturally ordinate and that they can be satisfied by government agencies without the necessity of some restraint upon inordinate, or at least disproportionate, demands."[3] Niebuhr concludes that it must not be assumed that "all government interference in economic process is either good or bad."[4] The effect of each type of interference must be studied.[5]

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[1] Niebuhr, Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 230.

[2] Ibid., pp. 230-231.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree that "the idea of the Kingdom of God is not identified with any special social theory."[6] They also agree that we must "let each social system and movement show us what it can contribute and . . . then weigh its claims."[1] There is agreement on the fact that some forms of industrial organization may be more Christian than others, but that they all fall short of the Christian standard of agape. Thus there is much pragmatism in the social ethics of each thinker in that each one recognizes the non-absoluteness of all social programs. Each man finds some value in the economic theories of socialism, but Rauschenbusch desires a more extensive socialization of industry than does Niebuhr.[2] Rauschenbusch is in agreement with Niebuhr's emphasis on the importance of gradual change in developing a more healthy industrial economy. Rauschenbusch's position on this point is illustrated by his practical proposals for industrial reform which should be enacted before socialism becomes a reality. Most of these measures, such as the enactment of a progressive inheritance tax, the recognition of the rights of labor, and the prohibition of child labor, have since been put into law, with the active support of Niebuhr.

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[1] Ibid., p. 233. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 233-234. [4] Ibid., p. 234.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Rauschenbusch, The Social Principles of Jesus, p. 75.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] This is true in regard to Niebuhr's more recent writings, but in his earlier works he was more in agreement with Rauschenbusch on the extent to which industry should be socialized. See pp. 54-58 in Chapter I of this dissertation.

2. Racial Relations

Niebuhr's understanding of the race issue furnishes a good example of his method of seeing each social problem in the light of the Christian Gospel. He points out that racial prejudice is a type of irrationality. Contempt for another group "is an inevitable concomitant of the ethnic will to live."[1] Niebuhr notes that "wherever life becomes collectively integrated it generates a collective, as well as an individual, survival impulse."[2] Man, however, is never satisfied with just physical survival. Every human survival impulse contains spiritual elements the corruption of which is pride and the will to power.[3] In reality race pride has its source in a mixture of ignorance and anxiety. Other races are judged falsely "because we ignorantly make the partial and particular standards of our own group into the final criteria of beauty, virtue or truth."[4] They are also judged falsely "because we fear the competitive threat of the other group and seek to discount it."[1] Race pride may be the root of other forms of pride and lust for power. In many respects it is a more obstinate problem than economic exploitation.[2]

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 139.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times, p. 12.

Niebuhr acknowledges that a problem of such complexity cannot be easily solved. He affirms that "no democratic society can afford to capitulate to the pride of dominant groups."[3] A democratic society should "use every stratagem of education and every resource of religion to generate appreciation of the virtues and good intentions of minority groups."[4] It must endeavor to establish contacts between groups and prevent the growth of prejudice through segregation. In other words, "a democratic society must . . . seek proximate solutions for this problem in indeterminate creative ventures."[5]

Writing in 1932, Niebuhr suggested that nonviolence would be a particularly strategic instrument for the use of the oppressed group. Then somewhat prophetically he pointed out that "the emancipation of the Negro race in America probably waits upon the adequate development of this kind of social and political strategy."[1] Niebuhr looked for the development of such strategy "with all the more reason and hope because the peculiar spiritual gifts of the Negro endow him with the capacity to conduct it successfully."[2] He would need only to combine "the aggressiveness of the new and young Negro with the patience and forbearance of the old Negro, to rob the former of its vindictiveness and the latter of its lethargy."[3] It is interesting how Niebuhr's prophecy has been fulfilled by the success of the Negro boycott against segregation on the busses in Montgomery, Alabama.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Race Issue," *Christianity and Society*, XI (Summer, 1946), 7.

[3] Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 143.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr both agree that a problem of such complexity as the race question cannot be easily solved. They agree on the importance of working toward a solution which will endeavor to satisfy what Rauschenbusch calls "the Christian consciousness of the whole nation."[4] Each man has suggested certain practical steps for the solution of the problem, such as better education for all races, better cooperation among all concerned, whether in the North or the South, and more contacts between groups of various racial backgrounds. Rauschenbusch, however, has far less to say on this subject than Niebuhr.[1] One primary difference between the two men on the race issue is that Rauschenbusch lacks Niebuhr's analysis of individual and group pride.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 252.

[2] Ibid., p. 254. [3] Ibid., p. 254.

[4] Rauschenbusch, "The Belated Race and the Social Problem," quoted in Sharpe, Walter Rauschen-Busch, p. 166.

3. International Relations

Increasingly Niebuhr's attention has been directed toward the problem of international relations until today it is his major concern. He writes that the problem of overcoming international chaos and "of extending the principle of community to world-wide terms has become the most urgent of all the issues which face our epoch."[2] The crisis of this age is due primarily to the fact that the necessities of a technical civilization have advanced beyond the limited order which individual states have attained. At the same time, the resources of modern civilization have not been sufficient to bring into existence political instruments of order broad enough to satisfy these requirements.[1]

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[1] See pp.294-295 of this chapter.

[2] Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, p. 153.

Niebuhr predicts that the international politics of future decades "will be dominated by great powers who will be able to prevent recalcitrance among the smaller nations, but who will have difficulty in keeping peace between each other because they will not have any authority above their own powerful enough to bend or deflect their wills."[2] They will succeed in creating systems of unilateral security which will appear adequate for their own safety, but will not be adequate to preserve the peace. Niebuhr believes that whatever unity may be realized "in the coming decades must be attained by the coalescence of power and the development of a core of international community among the great powers."[3] He regards, however, the possibility of a merger of sovereignties between them into one central authority as very remote. At present "there is not one center of power and community in the world, great and good enough to superimpose the first pattern of unity upon the diverse and competing national forces."[4] Niebuhr observes that there are three or four great centers which find it difficult to reach a strong agreement with each other. He feels that if they should fail in doing so, "their failure would result in further world conflict in which the units of conflict would be even greater and more sharply defined."[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[2] Ibid., p. 171.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., pp. 172-173.

In regard to the problem of building a world community, Niebuhr states:

> The task of building a world community is man's final necessity and possibility, but also his final impossibility. It is a necessity and possibility because history is a process which extends the freedom of man over natural process to the point where universality is reached. It is an impossibility because man is, despite his increasing freedom, a finite creature, wedded to time and place and incapable of building any structure of culture or civilization which does not have its foundation in a particular and dated locus.[2]

The world community is thus seen by Niebuhr as mankind's final possibility and impossibility."[3] He concludes:

> The task of achieving it must be interpreted from the standpoint of a faith which understands the fragmentary and broken character of all historic achievements and yet has confidence in their meaning because it knows their completion to be in the hands of a Divine Power, whose resources are greater than those of men, and whose suffering love can overcome the corruptions of man's achievements, without negating the significance of our striving.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 173.

[2] Ibid., p. 187.

[3] Ibid., p. 189.

[4] Ibid., pp. 189-190. For additional material on the subject of world community see Niebuhr, "Justice and World Community," The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, pp. 284-286.

Both Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr have recognized the fact that international relations is a problem of major concern to the Christian. As has been previously pointed out, however, it is a problem that has been much more central in the thinking of Niebuhr than of Rauschenbusch. Although Rauschenbusch was in many respects ahead of his day, he nevertheless was also a child of his times. This fact is vividly illustrated by the nationalistic emphasis found in his writings in which he criticized the socialist inclination to international union.[1] The spirit of isolationism was far stronger in America during the life span of Rauschenbusch than during that of Niebuhr. Were Rauschenbusch still alive, it is most likely that he would agree with Niebuhr's stress on the importance of closer cooperation among the nations. Even Niebuhr, however, does not believe that international union is an immediate possibility and has refused to join the World Federalist movement.[2]

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[1] Rauschenbusch, "The Ideals of Social Reformers," The American Journal of Sociology, II, 214-215.

[2] For the reasoning behind Niebuhr's refusal to join the World Federalist movement see Chapter III of this thesis, pp. 246-247. He believes that human community is never a simple construction of conscience or reason. You cannot establish world government by drawing up a blueprint of such a government. One of Niebuhr's best discussions of world community is found in The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, pp. 153-190.

As Rauschenbusch insisted on the need for christianizing the business world, so also he proclaimed the need for the christianizing of international relations. Along with such demands as those for disarmament and freedom of the seas, Rauschenbusch stressed that the problem of international peace was fundamentally the problem of expanding the area of love and social unity. Here once again we see the major difference between the social ethics of Rauschenbusch and that of Niebuhr. For Niebuhr it is impossible to think in terms of christianizing international relations. He holds that "the law of love is not immediately applicable to the realm of politics."[1] He points out that for a person "to say that if France and Germany really loved and forgave one another the danger of war between them would be eliminated is to utter a meaningless truism."[2] Niebuhr thoroughly considers the power-factors involved in the relations between nations. Thus, he concludes that peace among nations must be based on a proper balance of power rather than on a direct application of Christ's standard of love.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Britain Bewildered," The Christian Century, LIII (August 12, 1936), 1082.

[2] Ibid.

III. CONCLUSION[1]

No man can be fully understood and appreciated apart from an understanding of his life including the historical conditions under which he lived and wrote. This is certainly true of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr. It is therefore important that the historical and biographical material which is presented in the first chapter of this dissertation be kept in mind as this conclusion is read. History is a great teacher of men. Many of the differences between the social ethics of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr are at least partially due to the impact of recent historical events on the thought of the latter. The optimism expressed by Rauschenbusch at the beginning of the twentieth century could not long endure the challenge of two world wars, a major depression, and the present cold war between the United States and Russia. But in spite of the changed historical atmosphere, there are still basic similarities, as well as differences, between the social ethics of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr. Truly Niebuhr is indebted to Rauschenbusch for the latter's founding of social Christianity in this country. Rauschenbusch paved the way for much of the progress that Niebuhr has been able to make in the realm of social ethics.

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[1] This is the conclusion to both Chapter IV and the entire dissertation.

This conclusion will contain a summary and an evaluation of what this writer has learned in regard to the relation between Niebuhr's social ethics and the social ethics of Rauschenbusch. It has been the primary purpose of this dissertation to show that Niebuhr has developed his social ethics on the basis of the major premise of Rauschenbusch. This major premise is that the Christian Gospel is relevant to all areas of life, for both man and society stand in need of salvation. The primary purpose of this dissertation has now been achieved, for it has been shown that Niebuhr not only adheres to the major premise of Rauschenbusch, but also that he has developed his own social ethics on the basis of it. The secondary purpose has been to discover and set forth, primarily in relation to their social ethics, the agreements and disagreements between the two men on how the Christian Gospel is relevant to each particular social problem, on the nature of man, and on the nature of personal and social salvation. This purpose has also been achieved, and its results will now be summarized.

A. Agreements

In the course of the development of Niebuhr's social ethics he has continued to affirm some of the most important insights of Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr along with Rauschenbusch holds to the importance of the teachings of Jesus and the prophets in the development of a Christian social ethics. In their use of the Bible both men accept modern Biblical scholarship. They are each concerned with the presentation of the Gospel in a meaningful way to contemporary society, without compromising on the central truths of the faith.

Both men make use of the physical and social sciences when they feel that these sciences can be of value in the development of their theology or social ethics. They also recognize the significance of personal religious experience for theology and social ethics. They each note the power for both good and evil of such "super-personal" forces as political parties, corporations, and even churches. There is agreement on the fact that evil may reappear on a new level even though it might have been partially corrected on another. Niebuhr adheres to Rauschenbusch's belief in the social transmission of sin and to the latter's opposition to the biological inheritance of sin. There is agreement on the fact that the improvement of the organizations of society will lessen the practice of some forms of sin. They agree that often the most influential man or class is more guilty of injustice and pride than those who lack influence.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr are opposed to both legalism and antinomianism in religion. While emphasizing personal salvation, neither man believes that "saved" men will insure a "saved" society. They each oppose strict individualism which neglects the unity between individual man and society. They are also strong opponents of asceticism.

Neither man believes in using Greek metaphysics in order to explain such theological questions as that of the person of Christ. They each affirm that the atonement is a revelation of the love of God, and that since love is an important attribute of God it must also be an important attribute of man. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each proclaim man's need for repentance in order to come into a meaningful relationship with God. While they both acknowledge that there is a real change that takes place in the heart of the believer, neither man expects the total sanctification of the believer within history. As to eschatology, they are not literalists in regard to the Second Coming, the last judgment, and the resurrection, but they do hold to the Christian conviction of life after death.

Niebuhr agrees with Rauschenbusch in testifying that the Church should awaken society to an awareness of social problems. Together they recognize that under certain circumstances it may be necessary to use physical coercion in dealing with some of these problems. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr each refuse to identify the idea of the Kingdom of God with any particular social theory. While admitting that some forms of industrial organization may be more Christian than others, they go on to confess that all of them come short of God's standard of agape. Pragmatism is thus found in the social ethics of both men in that they each affirm the nonabsoluteness of all social programs. They agree on the importance of applying moral tests to the business world. They are each opposed to a relatively small group of men both owning and controlling the economy. The social ethics of each man is influenced to some extent by the economic theories of socialism. Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree on the importance of gradual change in the creation of a more just industrial economy.

As to natural law, they each disagree with both the Roman Catholic position and with Karl Barth's argument that man would be without valid principles of ethical guidance were it not for God's giving of the Ten Commandments. Niebuhr explicitly and Rauschenbusch implicitly recognize that there is such a thing as natural law. There are valid principles of ethical guidance that man may know apart from the Scripture. Both men place a greater emphasis on the law of love than on natural law. With Niebuhr, however, the law of love is not as much of an historical possibility as with Rauschenbusch.

The value of the principle of the separation of Church and State is acknowledged by both men. They each favor the active support of Christian groups in order to bring about the passage of just legislative measures in Congress. The judgment of Christ is proclaimed by both men against injustice wherever it is found. They each believe in democracy, and are opposed to all discrimination on the basis of race, class, or religion. In regard to international relations, they agree on the importance of closer cooperation among nations in the hopes of securing a lasting peace.

B. Disagreements

While the teachings of Jesus and the prophets are of central importance to both Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch, the former emphasizes other passages of Scripture as well, especially the writings of Paul. They are of particular importance to Niebuhr's understanding of man. Niebuhr frequently makes use of symbol and myth in interpreting portions of the Bible which are either discounted by Rauschenbusch or interpreted rationally. Whereas Niebuhr strives to derive his understanding of creation, history, man and God from the Bible, Rauschenbusch depends on modern thought for his basic theological ideas. The writings of the church fathers and of the reformers are relied upon more extensively by Niebuhr than by Rauschenbusch. The latter disregards many of these writings as signifying the Hellenization of Christianity.

Although both men affirm the value of individual religious experience, Niebuhr is careful to point out that such experience must be understood in the light of the experinece of the Christian community. He defines personal religious experience as "general" revelation, while "special" revelation is defined as that which is recorded in Scripture and proclaimed by the Church. In Rauschenbusch's thought the two types of revelation tend to merge together so that he thinks of personal religious experience as being "special" revelation.

In regard to the sinfulness of man, Rauschenbusch believes that much of man's wrong doing is due to his sensual equipment, ignorance, and inertia. Niebuhr, on the other hand, affirms that it is possible for man to sin because he is created in the image of God as a free being who is able to transcend himself. Thus man has the ability to raise some limited element of his life into the position of the divine. This fact is illustrated by the way in which man often makes his race, class or nation into his god. Rauschenbusch apparently does not grasp the dimension of sin which is set forth by Niebuhr in terms of man's unbelief which results in rebellion against God. Rauschenbusch is primarily concerned with man's moral and social iniquities. These sins are not overlooked by Niebuhr, but they are not as basic for him as man's unbelief and rebellion against God.

As has already been noted, Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr agree on the fact of the social transmission of sin and on the fact that the improvement of social institutions will lessen the practice of some forms of sin. Niebuhr, however, goes on to point out that the heart of sin, i.e., man's unbelief and rebellion against God which underlie his moral and social failings, will not be lessened by such improvement. This is true because man's bias toward the wrong is basically within his particular will rather than on the outside. Since Rauschenbusch does not fully understand this latter point, but instead defines sin chiefly in terms of selfishness which is manifested in the violation of ethical codes, he is convinced that such improvement will lessen even the heart of sin.

While both men affirm the power for both good and evil of the "super-personal" forces of society, Niebuhr goes on to oppose the treatment of such forces as individual persons. He rejects Rauschenbusch's belief that the organizations of society can be converted and renewed as though they were individual men.

Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr differ on the question of the relation between sin and guilt. Rauschenbusch agrees with Schleiermacher in thinking of sin as being practically identical with a person's consciousness of it. From such a position it logically follows that man is not guilty for his unconscious acts of sin. Niebuhr takes exception to this point of view in that he maintains that man is also guilty for his involuntary acts of sin. Thus Niebuhr concludes that a person who sincerely, but dishonestly, supports economic exploitation is nevertheless guilty of sin.

Niebuhr's thought is dialectical or paradoxical in contrast to Rauschenbusch's logical consistency. Niebuhr emphasizes what he believes to be true to both experience and Christian revelation rather than that which may be in harmony with the laws of reason. In discussing either theology or ethics, he endeavors to maintain the tension between an analysis of the human situation and the insights of Christian revelation. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, while trying to be true to his understanding of both experience and revelation, goes on and endeavors to maintain logical consistency in the presentation of his understanding of both theological and ethical questions. Thus reason is in reality made the arbitrator of experience and revelation. Niebuhr refuses to give such a significant place to reason.

A major difference between Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr is found in their attitude toward the problem of what is possible within history. This problem is apparent in their discussions of such topics as justification, the Kingdom of God, and the Christian ethics of love. The point of view that each man takes on these topics clearly reveals a basic difference between the two men. Rauschenbusch stresses immanence and continuity while Niebuhr stresses transcendence and discontinuity. Rauschenbusch consistently expects more in the way of individual and social salvation within history than does Niebuhr. This point is illustrated by the question of justification and sanctification. While they agree that total sanctification is not possible within history, Rauschenbusch does affirm that the contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose will be overcome in some of the areas of the Christian's life. Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch on this latter point for Niebuhr affirms that even the "saved" are constantly in need of God's justification. He stresses Martin Luther's affirmation that the Christian is both justified and a sinner at the same time. The social ethics of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr reflect the difference between them on the question of justification and sanctification. While neither man expects a social institution to measure up to God's standard of perfection, Rauschenbusch does expect such institutions to act more in harmony with God's purpose than does Niebuhr.

Their respective views of the Church also reflect the difference between them in regard to justification and sanctification. Rauschenbusch thinks of the Church as an institution composed of "saved" believers who should give social expression to the ethical teachings of Jesus. Rauschenbusch holds that the Church's ability to save depends upon whether or not it translates the life of Jesus into the social life of its community. Niebuhr understands the Church as being primarily that place where God's word as both judgment and grace may be heard. He believes that it would greatly weaken the Church to make its saving ability dependent upon the ethical achievements of its members.

The disagreement between the two men on the possibilities of history appears in their interpretation of the Kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch defines it primarily as an ideal earthly social order in contrast to Niebuhr's definition of it as primarily God's sovereignty over man. From the point of view of Niebuhr the Kingdom of God is most meaningful to man as both a judgment and a goal which will be fully attained only beyond history. He thinks that Rauschenbusch is too optimistic in hoping to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Niebuhr believes that such a view of the Kingdom of God endangers the dialectical relation between history and superhistory. It may also lead men to despair when society falls short of their expectations. Although Niebuhr does not expect as much in the way of social progress within history as does Rauschenbusch, neither does Niebuhr limit the possibilities of improvements within society.

While agreeing with Rauschenbusch in maintaining the relevance of the Christian ethic of love to all areas of life, Niebuhr disagrees with Rauschenbusch as to the historical possibility of founding society on love. Niebuhr believes, in contrast to Rauschenbusch, that the Christian standard of love is not a simple possibility for either man or society. At the same time, however, Niebuhr insists that the "love" (agape) which is emphasized in the New Testament is the Christian law of life. By this he means that love is the Christian law of life in the sense in which the love of God revealed in the suffering of Christ is a judgment upon all of man's failures and the standard by which all his partial achievements of good are measured. It is a goal toward which man strives. Niebuhr acknowledges that love may have its tentative triumphs even in the world, but he does not expect it to be as victorious as does Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr believes that the consistent practice of Christ's ideal of love will lead to the death of love on the cross. Rauschenbusch, however, sees the improvement of society to the extent that love will not always be crucified. Niebuhr is convinced that in this world of power-conflicts the best that the Christian can expect to realize is an approximation of justice among competing powers.

One reason why Rauschenbusch believes that the law of love is directly applicable to society is the fact that he sees Jesus as being involved in the conflicts and competitions of history while Niebuhr sees Jesus as refusing to participate in such conflicts.[1] According to the thought of Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr pictures Christ too much on the edge of history and thus does not give due recognition to his prudence and involvement in conflict. Thus it is seen that while both men think of the Gospel ethic primarily in terms of self-giving love, Rauschenbusch goes on to lay greater stress than Niebuhr on those events in the life of Christ which, according to Rauschenbusch, illustrate Christ's prudence and his participation in the struggles of history. Niebuhr would probably answer Rauschenbusch first of all by pointing out that not as much is known about Jesus' life as Rauschenbusch assumes. Secondly Niebuhr would note that the event of the cross reveals more of the heart of the ethics of Jesus than any other single event or group of events recorded in the Bible. Niebuhr writes:

> His [Jesus'] ethical doctrine contains an uncompromising insistence upon conformity to God's will without reference to the relativities and contingencies of historical situations. The animating purpose of his life is to conform to the agape of God. His life culminates in an act of self-abnegation in which the individual will ceases to be a protagonist of the individual life; and the life ends upon the Cross. The Cross could not have the symbolic significance for Christian faith if the life and the doctrine were not consistent with it. But on the other hand the Cross symbolizes the perfection of love more consistently

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[1] See pp. 214-218 of Chapter III for a discussion of this point.

than any cumulation of individual acts.[1]

Although both men recognize the necessity of using physical coercion under certain circumstances in order to correct social wrong, Niebuhr gives more recognition to the value of physical coercion than does Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr makes a detailed analysis of the power-factors involved in the maintenance of order, freedom, equality, and justice in society. He notes that society is often endangered by anarchy on the one hand and tyranny on the other. Since Rauschenbusch does not make such an analysis of the power-factors which participate in the struggle for justice, he does not give as central a place in his social ethics to the importance of physical force as is given by Niebuhr. Neither does Rauschenbusch recognize as fully as does Niebuhr the dangers to society of both anarchy and tyranny.

They agree that the moral tests of the Christian ethic should be applied to business, but Niebuhr makes a more extensive analysis of the technical problems of a modern economy than is made by Rauschenbusch. Because of this analysis, Niebuhr does not favor as extensive a program of socialization as is supported by Rauschenbusch. Instead, Niebuhr stresses the value of a mixed economy. His emphasis is on the distribution of economic power rather than on the ownership of the tools of production.

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, pp. 73-74.

C. Evaluation

Before bringing this dissertation to a close, I would like to devote a few pages to an evaluation. This dissertation covers a period of approximately one hundred years, ranging from the birth of Walter Rauschenbusch in 1861 to the present. At the time of the Civil War the churches were concerned with the question of slavery. After the Civil War, the problems of industrial and international relations began to take on increased significance and complexity. Rauschenbusch helped to awaken the churches to their responsibilities in these two areas of social concern. He succeeded in laying a foundation for Christian social ethics upon which men like Reinhold Niebuhr have built. In his effort to correct ethical complacency, however, Rauschenbusch undoubtedly made a number of mistakes which Niebuhr has corrected. Among Rauschenbusch's mistakes were the progressive view of history, the optimistic conception of human perfectability, the cultural lag explanation for sin, and the overconfident belief in the degree to which it is possible for society to live by the law of love. I am essentially in agreement with the corrections which Niebuhr has made to the thought of Rauschenbusch. Since these corrections have been dealt with in detail, I do not feel that it is necessary to review them now.

As has been indicated, the social ethics of both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr have been influenced by the historical conditions under which they have lived. Rauschenbusch endeavored to relate the Christian message to the problems of his time. Niebuhr has performed a similar task for contemporary man by helping him to understand himself and the social problems of today. As one writer states it, Niebuhr has "had a grasp of the issues and the alternatives that commanded attention, and his theology was forged in relation to them."[1] Those who follow in Niebuhr's steps will do well to learn to relate themselves to the problems of their day as he has related himself to the problems of his day.[2] We can learn from Niebuhr the importance of an open mind and the willingness to admit our mistakes. It is my conviction that many of Niebuhr's theological and social insights will continue to be valid while others will have to be corrected in the light of changed conditions. From our present perspective it is not possible to distinguish with absolute certainty between the permanent and the transitory in his thought. I do want, however, to point out some problems which I believe those who follow in Niebuhr's steps will have to face.

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[1] Van A. Harvey, "Reinhold Niebuhr and His Interpreters," Religion in Life, XXVI (Winter, 1956-1957), 121.

[2] Ibid.

1. Communication

One such problem is that of communication. It has never been an easy task to communicate the Gospel message to others. Certainly it is not easy today. The minister is faced with the problem of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel to both Christians and non-Christians. He is concerned that men come to have an understanding of both the religious and ethical truths of the Gospel. He wants men to make a personal commitment to God as He has revealed Himself in Christ. Niebuhr has excellently formulated the religious and social aspects of the Gospel. Also, he has succeeded in communicating them to the better educated among the clergy and to the intellectuals in the secular world. On the whole Niebuhr has not succeeded in communicating his understanding of the Gospel to the masses. This is not necessarily a valid criticism of Niebuhr, for no man in one lifetime can be expected to be all things to all people. It does mean, however, that those who have been helped by his theological and social insights do have the obligation of communicating them to the masses of men both within and without the churches. Those who have learned from Niebuhr must not fail their teacher by allowing his insights to become a support for the status quo in the realm of social ethics or for fundamentalism in the realm of theology. They must communicate Niebuhr's teaching with the same courage which Niebuhr himself has exhibited. It would greatly aid in the communicating of Niebuhr's thought to the laity if either Niebuhr or one of his students would write a book setting forth the heart of Niebuhr's theology and social ethics in a simplified form which could be easily understood by the average layman.

2. The Sin of Inertia

Niebuhr has thoroughly analyzed the sin of pride and the sin of sensuality, but he does not adequately deal with the sin of inertia. Perhaps one reason for Niebuhr's neglect of this type of sin is that "he himself is so incapable of such a sin."[1] Then, too, much of his own life has been spent in Detroit and New York City where the typical man usually exemplifies the sin of pride rather than the sin of inertia. Certainly the latter sin needs to be as adequately analyzed as the sin of pride and the sin of sensuality.

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[1] I am indirectly indebted to John C. Bennett for this statement. One of his students passed it on to me.

3. Ethical Motivation

An analysis of the sin of inertia will lead one to the problem of ethical motivation. One of the most difficult problems that social reformers face in America today is that of indifference on the part of millions of Americans who have become self-satisfied with the social, economic, and political status quo. That this is true of the vast majority of American college students is vividly pointed out by Philip E. Jacob in his book entitled Changing Values in College. He writes:

> A dominant characteristic of students in the current generation is that they are gloriously contented both in regard to their present day-to-day activity and their outlook for the future.[1]
>
> They are for the most part (with some allowance for sectional difference) ready to live in a mobile society, without racial, ethnic or income barriers. But they do not intend to crusade for non-discrimination, merely to accept it as it comes, a necessary convention in a homogenized culture.[2]

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[1] Philip E. Jacob, Changing Values in College: An Exploratory Study of the Impact of College Teaching (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

> American students are likewise dutifully responsive towards government. They expect to obey its laws, pay its taxes, serve in its armed forces--without complaint but without enthusiasm. They will discharge the obligations demanded of them though they will not voluntarily contribute to the public welfare. Nor do they particularly desire an influential voice in public policy. Except for the ritual of voting, they are content to abdicate the citizen's role in the political process and to leave to others the effective power of governmental decision. They are politically irresponsible, and often politically illiterate as well.[1]

Such a condition among college students is indeed alarming, and points up the problem of motivation in relation to any adequate social ethics. A number of criticisms involving the problem of ethical motivation have been leveled at Niebuhr. These will now be presented and answered in the light of Niebuhr's thought.

a. The Undercutting of Moral Action[2]

It is one of the ironies of history that the man in America who has probably done the most to make the Christian Gospel relevant to the contemporary world has been charged with having a part in undercutting moral action and by so doing in contributing to the indifference of the American people to social issues. In all fairness to Niebuhr this charge must be evaluated and its truth or falsehood established.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

[2] Without indicating whether he means Niebuhr as well as those he calls "the post-Niebuhrians," Paul L. Holmer charges that "much of recent theology--neo-orthodoxy, if you will--cuts the nerve of ethical endeavor." Paul L. Holmer, "Modern Theology--Another Evasion?" *The Christian Century*, LXXV (January 22, 1958), 103.

In answer to such a charge, it must be pointed out that no one man or theological movement can be held responsible for contemporary indifference to social issues when such indifference is so obviously largely due to changed historical conditions over which neither Niebuhr nor neo-orthodoxy had any control. Such events as World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean conflict, and the present cold war with Russia have helped to produce the present attitude toward social questions.

Another factor, however, which has contributed to the attitude of indifference to social issues is the naive idealism of many liberals. As has been indicated throughout this thesis, much of the social ethics of Rauschenbusch, particularly as set forth by some of his followers, could not hold up to the realities of history. The obvious failure of liberal social ethics to meet the needs of a disrupted world encouraged many people to become disillusioned with the Social Gospel in particular and with reform movements in general. Niebuhr has been in the forefront of the battle to encourage social action. The greatest interest in social problems today is frequently found on those college campuses where his influence has been felt. Had he not succeeded in producing a realistic social ethics to meet the needs of his time it is most likely that ethical indifference accompanied by lack of moral action would be even greater today.

b. The Use of the New Testament Ethics as a Principle of Criticism but not as a Motivational Pattern[1]

There are some who believe that Niebuhr has been guilty of making the New Testament ethics a principle of criticism but not a motivational pattern. It is true that he does make the New Testament ethics a principle of criticism. I believe, however, that it is false to say that he never makes the New Testament ethics a motivational pattern. Because Niebuhr does not speak of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount as a simple historical possibility, it is not legitimate to draw the conclusion that he holds that it is not a motivational pattern. In fact, he explicitly points out that the law of love which is set forth in the New Testament is "not something extra to be added to whatever morality we establish in our social relations. It is the guiding principle of them."[1] It is Christ's ethic of love which motivates Niebuhr to insist on the achievement of the highest justice possible. He believes, however, that man would reach greater heights of justice if he would acknowledge that even such heights contain both contradictions to and approximations of the goal of love. He affirms that "love may elicit a reciprocal response and change the character of human relations."[2]

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[1] Holmer points out that "from one extreme view, which declared that social and political realities were on God's side, we have swung to another extreme, which makes New Testament ethics a principle of criticism but never a motivational pattern." "Modern Theology--Another Evasion?" *The Christian Century*, LXXV, 103.

c. The Failure to Proclaim the Pragmatic Significance of Jesus[3]

The criticism is sometimes made that Niebuhr does not proclaim the pragmatic significance of Jesus. Those who make this accusation are correct if they mean that Niebuhr holds that the ethics of Jesus do not contain a ready-made solution to complicated social issues. It is, in fact, according to Niebuhr, the accepting of the ethics of Jesus as a simple pragmatic solution to difficult ethical questions which results in making Jesus' ethics irrelevant. This fact has been thoroughly substantiated throughout this thesis. If on the other hand, Niebuhr's critics mean that he has failed to proclaim the significance of the teachings of Jesus for the solution of social problems, they are incorrect. Again, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, the very heart of Niebuhr's social ethics contains his conviction that all social issues must be dealt with in the light of the Christian Gospel.

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[1] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 238.

[2] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 247. For a more detailed discussion on Niebuhr's position in regard to the relation of justice to love see pages 242-244 of Chapter III of this dissertation. Also see Reinhold Niebuhr, "Justice and Love," Christianity and Society, XV (Fall, 1950), 6-8.

[3] Holmer questions whether those in the neo-orthodox camp are proclaiming "the pragmatic significance of Jesus Christ." "Modern Theology--Another Evasion?" The Christian Century, LXXV, 103.

d. The Lack of a Positive Program and of Affirmative Principles[1]

Another criticism involving the problem of ethical motivation is that Niebuhr fails to give a positive program or to present clear affirmative principles for deciding which social causes are worthy of support. He would have to plead at least partially guilty to this charge, for it is his firm conviction "that no political decision can be reached in terms of merely broad principles, whether of 'freedom' or 'justice' or 'planning.'"[1] He believes that "damage to society is being done by general programs, serving as weapons of warring groups and classes."[2] Niebuhr's opposition to broad principles and general programs, however, does not mean that he has no way to determine the worth of various social causes. As is pointed out in the section in this chapter on Niebuhr's ethical principles, he believes that each social cause must be analyzed individually in the light of the Christian Gospel in order to decide whether it is worthy of the Christian's support.[3]

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[1] An example of this criticism is found in L. Harold DeWold's review of Niebuhr's book, Christian Realism and Political Problems. DeWolf points out that "no positive program is given nor does the author set forth any clearly affirmative principles for determining worthy social causes to support." L. Harold DeWolf, "Book Review of Christian Realism and Political Problems by Reinhold Niebuhr," The Journal of Bible and Religion, XXII (April, 1954), 126.

In concluding this section on ethical motivation, I would like to point out that the followers of great men often take one facet of their thought and neglect the rest. Niebuhr has not been completely immune from this phenomenon. It is not fair, however, to lay the full blame on him for the manner in which some of his followers have interpreted his social ethics. Some who have recognized the truth in his affirmation that the standard of the Sermon on the Mount is not a live option for history have tended to draw the false conclusion that they should be satisfied with society as it is. Niebuhr points out that when "the truth of the Atonement is appropriated inwardly . . . the alternate moods of despair and false hope are overcome and the individual is actually freed to live a life of serenity and creativity."[1] It appears to be all too easy in this age of tension and anxiety for the Christian to lay hold of Niebuhr's emphasis on serenity and fail equally to appropriate his emphasis on creativity.

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[1] Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," Christian Faith and Social Action, p. 230.

[2] Ibid., p. 231.

[3] For a detailed discussion of Niebuhr's ethical principles the reader may refer back to pages 299-319 of this chapter.

Niebuhr is not unaware of the fact that he may not have sufficintly stressed the positive answer of the Christian Gospel to man's predicament, and thus may have unwittingly given encouragement to those who favor the social status quo. He writes:

> I have, in the past at least, placed so much emphasis on the analysis of the human situation that I did not have time to preach a positive answer to the human predicament. Also, I dwelt so

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[1] Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, pp. 57-58.

> extensively upon the divine judgment that the divine mercy came short. In my own mind these emphases seemed important at the time because for a good part of my ministry the state of our culture was such that the Christian faith was regarded as completely irrelevant. I sought to establish its relevance by these analyses and therefore became preoccupied with the apologetic task and temper akin to Schleiermacher's address on religion to its intellectual despisers. I think now that a more positive message would have been preferable, though I still don't know how one may strike a right balance between the task of finding the "point of contact" and preaching the Gospel.[1]

Thus Niebuhr is increasingly trying to lay greater stress on a more positive message in order to overcome the social indifference of contemporary society. Few men throughout the history of the Christian Church have tried any harder than Reinhold Niebuhr to correct the weaknesses of their thought when they have become apparent. Those of the younger generation of theologians will be most fortunate if they can conserve some measure of Niebuhr's theological and ethical insights while at the same time following his example of humility as they face the theological and ethical issues of the future.

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[1] Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," Reinhold Niebuhr, pp. 440-441.

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[1] For a more extensive bibliography of Walter Rauschenbusch see Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, pp. 158-163; for a bibliography of Reinhold Niebuhr see Reinhold Niebuhr, edited by Kegley and Bretall, pp. 455-478.

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